



Bumthang URA Festival 2012
April 26 – May 07

DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 01:	ARRIVE PARO – THIMPHU
DAY 02:	THIMPHU
DAY 03:	THIMPHU – PUNAKHA
DAY 04:	PUNAKHA
DAY 05:	PUNAKHA – TRONGSA
DAY 06:	TRONGSA – BUMTHANG
DAY 07:	BUMTHANG
DAY 08:	BUMTHANG
DAY 09:	BUMTHANG – PUNAKHA
DAY 10:	PUNAKHA – PARO
DAY 11:	PARO
DAY 12:	DEPART PARO

DAY 01: April 26, 2012 ARRIVE PARO – THIMPHU

The flight to Paro is one of the most spectacular mountain flights in the world, with a constantly changing panorama of some of the highest mountains on earth. Bhutan Tours and Travels representative will meet you at Paro airport exit doors following customs formalities.

After lunch enjoy afternoon sightseeing around Paro, including a visit to the Ta Dzong Museum housing many religious relics, works of art and handicrafts offering a great orientation into Bhutan's historical, cultural, and religious past. Next, visit the Rimping Dzong to see the painting of the great saint Milarepa, considered as the master of meditation by the Bhutanese and believed to have attained enlightenment in a lifetime. Dzong's are large monasteries and district administrative centres, which were once strategic forts. Afterwards, drive to the capital, Thimphu (1.5 hours) following the Pachu River. Before dinner at the hotel there will be an orientation on Bhutanese etiquette by your guide. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 02: April 27, 2012 THIMPHU

Once a rustic village sitting in a broad, fertile river valley, Thimphu is today the nation's bustling capital. Enjoy a full day of sightseeing, including a visit to the National Memorial Chorten, completed by the Royal Queen Mother as a memorial stupa for the Third King who passed away in 1972. Continue on to 12th century Changangkha Temple and the Zilukha Nunnery. If there is time, you may visit the nursing pen for the Takin, the national animal of Bhutan, and Tashichhodzong, 'the fortress of the glorious religion' housing some ministries, His Majesty's secretariat, and the central monk body. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 03: April 28, 2012 THIMPHU – PUNAKHA

Drive over the Dochu-La pass (3,100 meters), which on a clear day offers an incredible view of Himalayan peaks before descending into balmy Punakha valley (about 3 hrs total driving time). The drive through the countryside affords a glimpse of everyday life in this most remote of Himalayan kingdom. In the Dochu-La area there are vast Rhododendron forests that grow to tree size and bloom in late April/early May covering the mountains in a riot of glorious spring colour.

Punakha was the ancient capital of Bhutan. On arrival, visit Punakha Dzong, the "Palace of Great Happiness" built in 1637 by the Shabdrung, the 'Unifier of Bhutan' as predicted by the great Guru



Rimpoche (Padmasambhava). It is situated at the confluence of the Mo Chu and Pho Chu (Mother and Father Rivers) and is the winter headquarters of the Je Khenpo and hundreds of monks who move en masse from Thimphu to this warmer location. The three story main temple of the Punakha Dzong is a breathtaking example of traditional architecture with four intricately embossed entrance pillars crafted from cypress and decorated in gold and silver. It was here on 17th December 1907, Bhutan's first king was crowned. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 04: April 29, 2012 PUNAKHA

In the morning drive to Yabesa village and hike to through ricefields and up to Khamsum Yueley Namgyal Chorten, built by her majesty the queen Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuk. Perched high on a hill on the bank of the river, the Chorten houses paintings belonging to Nyingmapa Traditions. Enjoy a picnic lunch on a picturesque riverside before driving back into the Punakha valley for a short walk to Chimi Lhakhang, temple of the Drukpa Kuenly who is also known as the Divine Madman. He inherited the Divine Madman title since he revolted against the orthodox Buddhism in his time. He taught the people that religion is an inner feeling and it's not necessary that one should be an ordained monk. He is also considered a symbol of fertility and most childless couples go to his temple for blessing. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 05: April 30, 2012 PUNAKHA – TRONGSA

Explore the bustling market town of Wangduephodrang before driving over the Pele La pass (3,420m) on the Black Mountain range which divides western and central Bhutan. White languor monkeys can often be spotted in the moss-draped forests in this area. Further on, in silent isolation surrounded by great forested hills is beautiful Chendibji Chorten built in the 18th Century to commemorate the subjugation of a local demon. It is built in a style unusual for Bhutan, with painted eyes facing the four directions. The imposing Trongsa Dzong can be viewed across a deep canyon to signal your approach to the town around a curving road. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 06: May 01, 2012 TRONGSA – BUMTHANG

After breakfast visit Trongsa Dzong, a masterpiece of Bhutanese architecture. Trongsa has the largest Dzong in Bhutan and its foundations were laid in the 16th Century. There are now 22 temples in the complex. The view from the Dzong is spectacular and one can see across the landscape for many miles. Also visit the Ta Dzong museum housing an incredible collection of historical artifacts of the Royal Family. After light refreshments you continue your journey towards Bumthang, one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the spiritual heartland of the kingdom. The road climbs rapidly up a series of hairpin turns out of Trongsa. After passing through cultivated fields and forested hillsides you will reach the Yutung La Pass (3400m). From here the road passes down through a dense, beautiful coniferous forest to a wide, cultivated valley known as Chummey valley before continuing on in the soft afternoon light to the town of Jakar. Check into your hotel and, visit Kurje Lhakhang, one of the most sacred places in the kingdom where Bhutan's patron saint Guru Rimpoche meditated and Jambay Lhakhang, erected by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century. It dates back to the origins of Buddhism in Bhutan and is one of the Kingdoms oldest temples. Halt at hotel of your choice.

DAY 07: May 02, 2012 BUMTHANG

Drive to the Ura valley to witness the colorful masked dances and cultural festivities of the Ura Festival. Join local villagers from the local area gathered in their finest clothes for an exciting tradition of music, dancing, colour, and religious blessings. Halt at the hotel of your choice.



DAY 08: May 03, 2012 BUMTHANG

Enjoy an excursion to Tang Valley, the most remote valley in the Bumthang district. Activities may include a 45 minute walk uphill to Ugyen Chholing Palace, built in the 16th century by the Trongsa Penlop Tshokey Dorji. The main building in the complex now features a fascinating museum offering a real insight into the lifestyle of a Bhutanese noble family. Highlights include a book of divination, a dakini dance costume made of bone. You may also visit 14th century Tang Rimochen Lhakhang where Guru Rinpoche meditated and Mebar Tsho (Burning Lake), where some of Guru Rinpoche's treasures were found in the 15th century by the famous treasure discover Pema Lingpa. It's a good location to meditate. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 09: May 04, 2012 BUMTHANG – PUNAKHA

In the morning visit visit Tamshing Lhakhang, founded in 1501 by Tertön Pemalingpa (founder of the Nyingmapa sect) and containing interesting and ancient Buddhist wall paintings. Pemalingpa's heavy coat of nails is kept in the Vestibule and people are permitted to try it on. You now continue your journey back to western Bhutan. Punakha will be your next stop. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 10: May 05, 2012 PUNAKHA – THIMPHU – PARO

In the morning drive to Yabesa village and hike to through ricefields and up to Khamsum Yueley Namgyal Chorten, built by her majesty the queen Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuk. Perched high on a hill on the bank of the river, the Chorten houses paintings belonging to Nyingmapa Traditions. Take a picnic lunch on a picturesque riverside before exploring the Wangduephodrang Dzong. Built in 1639 the strategically located Dzong is perched on a spur at the confluence of two rivers. Drive back to Thimphu where you will have an opportunity to visit handicraft and souvenir stores. Proceed to Paro in the evening. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 11: May 06, 2012 PARO

After breakfast, you set out to make a pilgrimage to one of the most important religious sites in the Himalaya, 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 Drolo, 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. For those interested, it is possible to get a closer view by hiking another hour (each direction) to reach the temple. Otherwise we can relax at the tea house and enjoy the breathtaking views. In the afternoon drive to the ruins of the 17th Century Drukgyel Dzong, a historic monument built by the Shabdrung to commemorate his victory against invading Tibetans in 1644. On the return drive to Paro, visit 7th Century Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the 108 temples constructed by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo. Alternatively, day 11 could be spent on a day trip to the Haa Valley, one of the most picturesque districts in Bhutan. Reached via the beautiful Chelila Pass, Haa Valley is characterised by its surrounding rugged and mountainous terrain. Halt at the hotel of your choice.

DAY 12: May 07, 2012 DEPART PARO

Breakfast at hotel and say goodbye to your guide.
Airport Drop.