



## DEPTH OF BHUTAN

14 days / 13 nights

### Day 1

### Paro

On arrival at Paro airport you will be met and transferred to the hotel. This evening take an exploratory walk around the main street. Overnight at the hotel in Paro.

### Day 2

### Paro

***Paro is a most picturesque valley, with quaint hamlets clustered amidst terraced paddy fields. The town still maintains tradition by way of its architecture and simple way of life.***

In the morning visit to Ta dzong, formerly a watchtower but now housing the National Museum. Ta Dzong holds a unique and varied collection, ranging from ancient armour to textiles, thangka paintings, stamps, coins, and natural history. Then walk down a hillside trail to visit Paro Dzong (Rinpung Dzong) built in 1646 during the time of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. It now houses Paro's monk body and the offices of the civil administration.

After lunch drive up valley to Drukgyel Dzong or "the Fort of Drukpa Victory". In former times, the Bhutanese repelled invasions by Tibet from this fortress. Though largely destroyed by fire in 1951, the ruins still present an imposing sight. On a clear day, there is a splendid view of Bhutan's sacred mountain, Chomolhari from the approach to Drukgyel Dzong. Also visit a traditional Bhutanese house in the village nestled below the dzong. On the way back to Paro visit Kyichu Lhakhang, established in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and one of the two oldest shrines in the kingdom (the other is in Bumthang), reflecting the introduction of Buddhism in Bhutan. Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B

### Day 3

### Paro-Thimphu 55kms – approx 1½ hours

After breakfast, visit Taktsang Monastery. This is the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries and is spectacularly perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. Taktsang is a place of pilgrimage, which Bhutanese try to visit at least once in a lifetime. It is said that in the 8th century Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a tigress from eastern Bhutan to this place and meditated in a cave here for 3 months, hence its name, 'Tiger's Nest'. The site, which has long been recognised as a sacred place was visited by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646. The principal lhakhang of the present monastic complex dates from 1692. The main structure was severely damaged by fire in 1998, but after many years of painstaking renovation work, the complex has now been fully restored to its former glory.

After lunch drive to Thimphu, the modern capital town, passing through idyllic countryside, with villages and paddy fields on either side of the road. En route visit Simtokha Dzong, one of the oldest fortresses of the country, which now houses the Institute for Language and Culture studies. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu. B

#### **Day 4**

#### **Thimphu**

After breakfast enjoy a sightseeing tour of Thimphu valley, visiting Trashichhoedzong, the seat of the government; the National Memorial Chorten, within which there are finely executed wall paintings and delicately fashioned statues which provide deep insight into Buddhist philosophy; and the Handicrafts Emporium, which displays a wide range of the traditional handicrafts for which Bhutan is renowned. You may also be able to catch a game of archery in progress at the Changlimethang sports ground, just below the town.

This afternoon visit the National Library, which holds a vast collection of ancient Buddhist texts and manuscripts, some dating back several hundred years, as well as modern academic books mainly on Himalayan culture and religion. Then visit the Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as Painting School) where students undertake a six-year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Also visit the Textile & Folk Heritage Museums, a fascinating testimony of Bhutan's living traditions. Take an early evening stroll around the market area before dinner. B

#### **Day 5**

#### **Thimphu-Punakha 75kms – approx 3 hours**

After breakfast, proceed to Punakha across Dochu-la pass (3,088m/10,130 ft). The highest point on the road is marked by a large Bhutanese Chorten and prayer flag fluttering on the hill. On a clear day, there is a breathtaking view over the high peaks of the eastern Himalayas from this spot.

Check into the hotel on reaching Punakha. Overnight at the hotel in Punakha. B

***Until 1955, Punakha served as the capital town of Bhutan and it is still the winter seat of the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot). Visit Punakha Dzong, built by Shabdrng Ngawang Namgyal in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and situated at the junction of Pho Chu and Mo Chu rivers.***

#### **Day 6**

#### **Punakha-Wangduephodrang-Gangtey 70kms – approx 3 hours**

After breakfast, drive to Wangduephodrang and visit the Dzong, which is perched on a spur at the confluence of two rivers. The position of Dzong is remarkable as it completely covers the spur and commands an impressive view both up and down the valley. Wangdue district is famous for its bamboo work, stone carvings, and slate, which is mined up a valley, a few kilometers from the town.

Then drive up a winding mountain road through oak and rhododendron forests, and over a high pass down into the Phobjikha valley, surely one of the loveliest high altitude valleys in Bhutan. Phobjikha is one of the few glacial valleys, and chosen winter home of the black-necked cranes, migrating from the Tibetan plateau. Explore Phobjikha valley and also visit Gangtey Gompa (monastery), the only Nyingmapa monastery in western Bhutan. Overnight at the hotel in Gangtey. B

#### **Day 7**

#### **Gangtey-Trongsa 120kms – approx 4½ hours**

In the morning explore Phobjikha valley, hopefully sighting some black-necked cranes. Later drive to Trongsa across Pele-la pass (3,300m/10,830 ft). This pass is traditionally considered the boundary between western and central Bhutan. Further down the road, stop to visit Chendbji Chorten erected in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by a Tibetan lama to cover the remains of an evil spirit that was subdued at this spot. It is built in the Nepalese style, with painted eyes at the four cardinal points.

The landscape around Trongsa is spectacular and its impressive dzong, stretched along a ridge above a ravine, first comes into view about an hour before the winding road suddenly leads you into the town. Overnight at the hotel in Trongsa. B

#### **Day 8**

#### **Trongsa-Bumthang 68kms – approx 3 hours**

Morning visit Trongsa Dzong. Built in 1647 by the Shabdrung, it is the most impressive Dzong in Bhutan. The Dzong itself is a labyrinth of temples, corridors and offices holding court over the local community. It is built on many levels into the side of the hill and can be seen from every approach to Trongsa heralding its strength as a defensive stronghold.

After lunch proceed to Bumthang, one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the holy heartland of Buddhism. The road winds steeply up to Yutong-la pass (3,400m/11,155 ft), then runs down through dense coniferous forest to enter a wide, open, cultivated valley, known as Chumey valley. From here it is about an hour to Bumthang, a most pleasant run in the soft, late afternoon light. Overnight at the hotel in Bumthang. B

### **Day 9**

### **Bumthang**

***Bumthang is the general name given to combination of four valleys – Chumey, Choekhor, Tang and Ura with altitude varying from 2,600m to 4,000m. It is home to many of prominent Buddhist temples and monasteries.***

In the morning we will visit Kurje Lhakhang, one of the most sacred places in the kingdom as Bhutan's 'patron saint', Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) meditated here. From Kurje monastery, a tarmac road heads south along the right bank of the river to Jambey Lhakhang. This temple, erected by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, is one of the two oldest in Bhutan (the other being Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro).

After lunch visit Tamshing lhakhang, founded in 1501 by Pema Lingpa. It contains interesting and ancient Buddhist wall paintings. Later on visit Jakar Dzong, 'the dzong of the white bird', then take a stroll through Bumthang's market area before returning to the lodge. Overnight at the hotel in Bumthang. B

### **Day 10**

### **Bumthang-Mongar 198kms – approx 7 hours**

The journey continues eastwards, winding through more rugged terrain. We will drive up into the hills above the valley and then past Ura village, before climbing sharply to the highest point on Bhutan's motorable road network, Thrumshing-la pass (4,000m/13,125 ft).

From here, the road gradually descends to the alpine valley of Sengor with wonderful views of cascading waterfalls and the hills of eastern Bhutan along the way. Vegetation changes from alpine to subtropical with the loss of height, and bamboos and luxuriant ferns overhang the road as we drop down to the valley floor. The descent stops at 700m/2,300ft, where we cross the Kurichu River. We ascend again through pine forests, maize fields and eastern hamlets to reach Mongar town, high on a gentle slope above the valley.

We visit Mongar Dzong, built in the 1930s and one of Bhutan's newest Dzongs, but constructed in the same way as all previous Dzongs, without either plans or the use of nails. Overnight at the hotel in Mongar. B

### **Day 11**

### **Mongar-Trashigang 96kms – approx 3 hours**

The first part of the journey is through leafy forest filled with ferns. After driving through the Kori-la pass (2,450m/8,040ft), marked by a pretty chorten and a mani wall, we descend rapidly through corn fields and banana groves to reach the famous zigzag road just below Yadi, a fairly recent and now fast growing settlement.

After zigzagging down the hillside, the road east along the Gamri River we turnoff to the leftside up to Drametse. The temple, perched on top of a steep hill above the village, was founded by Choeden Zangmo and is the most important monastery of eastern Bhutan. This is the place of origin of the famous Drametse

Nga Chham, a masked dance with drums. About 30kms onwards lies Trashigang (1,100m/3,610ft), which clings to a steep hillside above the Gamri river. Trashigang is the principal township of the biggest and most populated district in the country.

After lunch, we will visit Trashigang Dzong, standing at the extreme end of a rocky outcrop far above the river gorge. It serves as the administrative seat for the district and part of the Dzong is occupied by the local Drukpa monastic community. Overnight at the hotel in Trashigang. B

### **Day 12**

### **Trashigang**

After breakfast we visit the temple of Gom Kora, set on a small alluvial plateau overlooking the river. Gom Kora is a famous place, as Guru Rinpoche is said to have subdued a demon here, trapping it in a rock. We continue on down the road to Doksum village, where you can see women busily weaving traditional Bhutanese fabric, and a chainlink swing bridge dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The road turns into the hills here, running up the side of a winding river valley to Trashiyangtse.

***In former times, Trashiyangtse was an important center because it lies on one of the caravan routes leading from western and central Bhutan. Trashiyangtse is now a rapidly growing town and the administrative center for this district. The area is famous for its wooden containers and bowls, which make inexpensive, attractive and useful souvenirs of a visit to this remote region.***

Visit Trashiyangtse Dzong, which overlooks the town and was built in the late 1990s when the new district was created. If time permits, we will also visit the dazzling white stupa of Chorten Kora on the riverbank below the town. In the evening, we return to Trashigang. B

### **Day 13**

### **Trashigang-Samdrup Jongkhar 180kms – approx 6 hours**

Drive to Samdrup Jongkhar. Along the way pass by Sherubtse College, the only college in the country founded in 1978. Also visit the Zangtho Pelri temple built in 1978 by the late Minister of Home Affairs. It represents Guru Rinpoche's paradise. At Khaling visit the Blind School and Weaving Centre. Deothang, 80kms from Khaling is the centre of Technical training college and road maintenance head quarters for the east. From here the road descends fairly rapidly to the plain through a dense tropical forest with an abundance of teak, bamboo and ferns. Overnight at the lodge in Samdrup Jongkhar. B

### **Day 14**

### **Samdrup Jongkhar**

After breakfast transfer to Bhutan border where you will be picked up by our Indian agent for your onward drive to Guwahati. B