



AN ENCHANTING REALM

11 days / 10 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

After breakfast take an excursion to Taktsang Monastery. Legend says that Guru Padsambhava came here flying on the back of tigress and meditated at the place where the monastery now stands. Taktsang or Tiger Nest was severely damaged by fire in April 1998 and now it has been restored in its original splendour.

This afternoon visit Ta Dzong. It was a watchtower built to defend Rinpung Dozng during inter-valley wars of the 17th century, however since 1967 Ta Dzong serves as the National Museum of the country. It holds a fascinating collection of art, relics, religious thangka paintings and Bhutan's exquisite postage stamps.

Walk down the trail to visit Rinpung Dzong. Built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the first spiritual and temporal ruler of Bhutan, the Dzong houses the monastic body of Paro, the office of the Dzongda (district administrative head) and Thrimpon (judge) of Paro district. Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B

Day 3

Paro-Thimphu 55kms – approx 1½ hours

After breakfast proceed to Thimphu, the modern capital of Bhutan. En route stop at Chuzom (confluence) where the Paro River joins the Thimphu River. Nearby Thimphu visit to Simtokha Dzong. This dzong, built in 1627 is the oldest in Bhutan. It now houses the Institute for Language and Culture Studies.

This afternoon enjoy a sightseeing tour of Thimphu to include:

- National Memorial Chorten: The building of this landmark was envisaged by the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, as 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 to world peace. The paintings and statues inside the monument provide a deep insight into Buddhist philosophy.
- Trashichhoedzong: This impressive fortress/monastery houses Secretariat building, the throne room of His Majesty, the King and various government offices. It is also the summer residence of Chief Abbot and central monk body.
- Textile and Folk Heritage Museum: These museums, both of which opened in 2001, provide fascinating insights into Bhutanese material culture and way of life.

- Handicrafts Emporium: This government-run enterprise displays a wide range of beautifully hand-woven textiles and craft products. It also carries a small collection of books on Bhutan, Buddhism and Himalayan culture.

Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu. B

Day 4 **Thimphu-Punakha** 75kms – approx 3 hours

Morning sightseeing tour of Thimphu including 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.

After lunch drive up to Dochu-la pass (3,088m/ 10,130 ft) stopping briefly here to take in the view and admire the chorten, mani wall, and prayer flags which decorate the highest point on the road. If skies are clear, the following peaks can be seen from this pass (left to right): Masagang (7,158m), Tsendagang (6,960m), Terigang (7,060m), Jejegangphugang (7,158m), Kangphugang (7,170m), Zongphugang (7,060m), a table mountain that dominates the isolated region of Lunana – finally Gangkar puensum, the highest peak in Bhutan at 7,497m. Overnight at the hotel in Punakha. B

Day 5 **Punakha-Wangduephodrang-Gangtey** 70kms – approx 3 hours

Morning visit Punakha Dzong. Built strategically at the junction of Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to serve as the religious and administrative centre of the region, Punakha Dzong has played an important role in Bhutan's history. Damaged by four catastrophic fires and an earthquake, the Dzong has been fully restored.

Continue to Gangtey via Wangduephodrang. Visit the majestic Wangdue Dzong and interesting local market. Pass through dense forests with oak and rhododendron trees before reaching Gangtey (Phobjikha).

This evening take a walk around Gangtey village and visit Gangtey Gompa, the only Nyingmapa monastery in this region. Overnight at the hotel in Gangtey. B

The valley of Gangtey is one of the most beautiful spots in Bhutan. The surprise of finding such a wide, flat valley without any trees after the hard climb through dense forests is augmented by an impression of vast space, and extremely rare experience in Bhutan where most of the valleys are tightly enclosed.

Day 6 **Gangtey-Trongsa** 120kms – approx 4½ hours

This morning explore the Phobjikha valley. This place is the winter home of black-necked cranes that migrate here from the Central Asiatic plateau in the north to pass winter in milder and lower temperatures.

After lunch drive on to Trongsa across Pele-la pass (3,300m/10,830 ft), the traditional boundary between east and west. A large white chorten prayer flag marks the pass. There is an abrupt change in vegetation at this point, with mountain forest replaced by high altitude dwarf bamboo.

Stop en route at Chendbji Chorten, patterned on Kathmandu's Swayambhunath Stupa, with eyes painted at the four cardinal points. It was built in the 18th century by Lama Shida from Tibet, to cover the remains of an evil spirit that was subdued at this spot. Overnight at the hotel in Trongsa. B

Day 7 **Trongsa-Bumthang** 68kms – approx 3 hours

Morning visit Trongsa Dzong. Like almost all towns in the Kingdom, this Dzongs architecture dominates the entire Trongsa horizon dwarfing the surrounding buildings. Built in 1648, it was the seat of power over central and eastern Bhutan. Both the first and second King ruled the country from this ancient seat.

After lunch, drive to Bumthang over the Yutong-la pass (3,400m/ 11,155 ft). The road winds steeply up to the pass, 28kms from Trongsa, then runs down through coniferous forest into a wide, open cultivated valley known as the Chumey valley. Overnight at the hotel in Bumthang. B

Day 8

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.

Visit Kurje Lhakhang, where the saint Padmasambhava subdued a local demon and left his body imprint on a rock. Also visit the Jambey Lhakhang (7th century temple), Tamshing Lhakhang (housing some of the oldest wall paintings in Bhutan) and Jakar Dzong (administrative center of the region). This afternoon free time to stroll around the village, visit the little handicrafts shop at the entrance to the town, and perhaps take refreshments at a local restaurant. Overnight at the hotel in Bumthang. B

Day 9

Bumthang-Wangduephodrang 190kms – approx 6 hours

Visit Bamthang market this morning then drive to Wangduephodrang. Enroute visit village houses. Overnight at the hotel in Wangduephodrang. B

Day 10

Wangduephodrang-Paro 125kms – approx 4 hours

After breakfast drive to Paro. En route visit Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1647 by the Shabdrung to commemorate the Bhutanese victory over the Tibetans in war of 1644. Also visit Kyichu Lhakhang, built in the 7th century by the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo. Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B

Day 11

Paro

After breakfast you will be transferred to the airport for your onward flight. B