



THE KINGDOM ABOVE THE CLOUDS

7 days / 6 nights

Day 1

Phuentsholing

On arrival in Phuentsholing you will be met and transferred to the hotel.

The gateway to the south, Phuentsholing is a thriving commercial centre on the northern edge of the Indian plains. Situated directly at the base of the Himalayan foothills, it is a fascinating mixture of Indian and Bhutanese, a perfect example of mingling of people and their culture.

If time permits, visit Zangtho Pelri Lhakhang. This small temple built in the centre of Phuentsholing town represents the heaven of Guru Rimpoche. Later take a stroll around the towns market area. Overnight at the hotel in Phuentsholing.

Day 2

Phuentsholing-Thimphu 180kms – approx 6 hours

After breakfast, drive to Thimphu. 4 km ahead of Phuentsholing, visit Kharbandi Gompa, the beautiful monastery situated in garden of tropical plants and flowers. The monastery contains paintings depicting scenes from the life of Buddha and statues of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Guru Rimpoche. From the monastery garden there is a splendid view of Phuentsholing and plains of West Bengal and their tea gardens beyond.

Proceed further to Thimphu. This entire drive is very pleasant with numerous scenic spots en route. Lunch would be served at Bunakha cafeteria. Five miles, before Thimphu, visit Simtokha Dzong, the oldest fortress of the Kingdom which now houses the School for religious and cultural studies. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu. B

Day 3

Thimphu

Thimphu, perhaps the most unusual capital city in the world, is the seat of government. This bustling town is home to Bhutan's royal family, the civil servants, and foreign missions with representation in Bhutan. It is also the headquarters for a number of internationally funded development projects.

Morning visit to Trashichhoedzong, the beautiful medieval fortress/monastery which houses most of the Government's office and King's Throne room. It is also the summer residence of Je Khenpo, the Chief Abbot. Proceed to the National Library, which houses an extensive collection of Buddhist literature, with some works dating back several hundred years. Visit the nearby Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as the Painting School), where a six-year training course is given in the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan.

After lunch, visit the National Memorial Chorten. This landmark was originally envisaged by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (the father of modern Bhutan), who wanted to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it serves both as a

memorial to the Late King and as a monument to peace. Visit the government-run Handicrafts Emporium and privately owned crafts shops, which offer a wide range of handcrafted products, including the splendid thangka paintings and exquisitely woven textiles for which Bhutan is famous. Also visit the folk Heritage and National Textile Museums, a fascinating testimony of Bhutan's living traditions. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu. B

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

After early breakfast, 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.

Later 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 by the present King.

After that drive to Wangduephodrang visiting Dzong and local market. The district of Wangduephodrang is also famous for its bamboo products, slate and stone carvings. Overnight at the hotel in Punakha. B

Day 5 **Punakha-Paro** *125kms – approx 4 hours*

After breakfast drive to Paro. Visit Ta Dzong, once a watchtower, built to defend Rinpung Dzong during inter-valley wars of the 17th century, Ta Dzong was inaugurated as Bhutan's National Museum in 1968.

Afterwards, walk down a hillside 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 6 **Paro**

After breakfast drive up the valley to view the ruins of Drukgyel Dzong. It was from here that the Bhutanese repelled several invading Tibetan armies during the 17th century. Nearby visit traditional Bhutanese Farm House, which offers good insight into lifestyle of local people.

Then take an excursion to Taktsang Monastery, the most famous of Bhutanese monasteries. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery hence it is called "Tiger's Nest". The excursion to monastery takes about 5 hours for round trip. On the return to Paro visit Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the oldest and most sacred shrines of the Kingdom. Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B

Day 7 **Paro**

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