

LAYA GASA TREK, BHUTAN



Bhutanese farmhouse in front of Mount Jitchu Drake



HIGHLIGHTS

- One of Bhutan's finest treks travelling through picturesque farmland, forests, alpine pastures and to high passes.
- Superb mountain views of Bhutan's most impressive peaks including Chomolhari and Jitchu Drake.
- Cultural tour of Paro at the beginning of the trip and of Thimphu after the trek.

REASONS TO CHOOSE THE MOUNTAIN COMPANY FOR LAYA GASA TREK

- The Mountain Company organised a successful Laya Gasa and Lunana Snowman trek in October 2008. Due to our good contacts in Bhutan we did not lose any days due to logistical problems organising animal transport.
- The Laya Gasa itinerary has been designed based on this first hand experience which is the best in terms of acclimatisation, safety and enjoyment.
- We use **Mountain Hardwear Trango 3.1** tents for all camping treks in Bhutan. These are three person domed tents where there is plenty of space for two people sharing a tent plus gear.
- There will be a range of tasty meals for breakfast, lunch and supper.
- We bring a comprehensive first aid kit from UK (Life Systems Mountain Leader) plus high altitude medicine, antibiotics and other medicines.
- Pre trip support will be given by Roland via email, phone or face to face meetings.



TESTIMONIALS

"The trek was fantastic thank you, our guide (Tashi) was great and the horseman we had knew the area very well. We spent four days around Mt. Masangang which was superb. The day closest to the Tibetan border was the best (not too close) - glaciers and lakes etc and good weather." Laya Gasa trek with Masagang BC extension, Mike and Louise (UK)

LAYA GASA TREK, BHUTAN

Total number of days	19 days
Grade & days trekking	Moderate, 13 trekking days
Accommodation	6 nights hotel, 12 nights camping
2011 price ex Kathmandu	3 pax: US\$3,995 2 pax: US\$4,475 (Bhutan government surcharge US\$30 per person per night for 16 nights) 1 pax: US\$4,635 (Bhutan government surcharge of US\$40 per person per night for 16 nights)
Dates	April 27 th to May 15 th 2011 October 5 th to October 23 rd 2011 April 25 th to May 13 th 2012 October 3 rd to October 21 st 2012



THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN THE PRICE OF THE TRIP

- Return Druk Air flight to/from Kathmandu & Paro.
- All transfers including airport collections at Kathmandu & Paro.
- Twin share room at Hotel Tibet in Kathmandu and all hotels in Bhutan.
- Breakfast only at Hotel Tibet in Kathmandu, all meals included while in Bhutan.
- Twin share tents while on trek using our three person Mountain Hardwear Trango 3.1s.
- All trekking arrangements including permits and fees, tents, TMC guide, pack animals and cook.
- Financial protection insurance with International Passenger Protection.
- Pre departure support and advice from The Mountain Company by email, phone or face to face meetings in London. After booking with us we will send our comprehensive “Bhutan Trek Information” notes.

THE FOLLOWING SINGLE SUPPLEMENT IS AVAILABLE:

Single room supplement	USD\$POA
Single tent supplement	USD\$150

Please note that if you are a single person booking on one of our trips you do not have to pay the single room supplement, this is only payable if you specifically request to have a room or tent to yourself. You will not have to pay this for this option if you happen to end up with a single room or tent due to odd numbers on the trip.



THE FOLLOWING IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE OF THE TRIP

- International flight to/from Kathmandu (London from £600).
- Travel & trekking insurance (Snowcard from £70).
- Nepalese transit visa valid for 48 hours at US\$5 (approx £3).
- Lunch and evening meals in Kathmandu.
- Personal clothing & equipment please see Appendix for suggested kit list.
- Tips.
- Other items not listed in "What is included".

YOUR COMPLETE FINANCIAL PROTECTION

In accordance with "The Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992" all passengers booking with The Mountain Company are fully protected for the initial deposit and subsequently the balance of all monies paid to us, including repatriation if required, arising from cancellation or curtailment of your travel arrangements due to the insolvency of The Mountain Company.

This Insurance has been arranged by International Passenger Protection Limited and underwritten by Insurers who are members of the Association of British Insurers. A certificate detailing this cover will be given to each passenger as evidence of cover.





PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Participants should be aware trekking, mountaineering and travelling in a developing country are activities that involve a risk of personal injury or death. As a condition of booking you must accept these risks and be responsible for your own actions and involvement.

Adventure travel requires an open and flexible attitude. You may experience extreme conditions, unpredictable weather and last minute changes to the itinerary beyond our control. Lack of acclimatisation to high altitudes could also be a risk factor. Our itineraries allow optimum time for acclimatising although it is possible that some individuals might be slow acclimatisers.

The majority of our trips visit remote areas where you are away from normal emergency services and medical facilities. In case of a serious injury requiring hospitalisation, it has to be accepted by you, evacuation could take up to several days and may impede your ensuing recovery. Helicopters are the most usual means of evacuation, however they are not always available or they may be hindered by poor weather and flying conditions.

INTRODUCTION

One of the finest treks in the Himalaya covering a long distance across northern Bhutan along the border with Tibet.

Laya Gasa trek starts near Paro crosses four Himalayan mountain passes to arrive at the village of Laya, from here we descend to the hot springs at Ghasa then to the Punakha Valley followed by a drive to Thimpu. You will travel through a cross section of Bhutan landscape from picturesque farmland, forests, alpine pastures to high Himalayan passes.

There are superb mountain views of Bhutan's most impressive peaks including Chomolhari and Jitchu Drake. Along the way you will see a number of Dzongs, these are fortress monasteries located in strategic positions along the Tibet border.



DETAILED ITINERARY

It is our intention to keep to the day by day itinerary detailed below, although there might be some flexibility due to local conditions or other factors beyond our control. If this is the case the trek leader will do everything possible to work out the changes to the itinerary in order to minimise your inconvenience.

Day 1. Fly to Kathmandu.

You will be met on arrival at Kathmandu airport and driven back to the hotel. Please provide travel plans on booking and we will arrange the pick up and transfer. A full expedition briefing will be given in the afternoon. **Overnight at Hotel Tibet.**

Day 2. Fly to Paro (2,280m), afternoon sightseeing.

After the transfer to the airport we fly by Druk Air to Paro. The flight has superb views of the Himalayas. On arrival we meet our Bhutanese guide and driven back to the hotel in Paro. In the afternoon we will explore Paro town, change money at the bank and then visit Paro Dzong and the National museum.

Day 3. Morning walk to Taktsang monastery (Tiger's Nest)

After breakfast we walk up to the Taktsang monastery know as the "Tiger's Nest". It takes about 2 to 3 hours to walk through pine forest and up to the monastery perched on a cliff overlooking the valley.

Day 4. Trek to Shana (2,790m)- 5 hours walking.

There is a short drive to the roadhead at Drukgel Dzong for the start of the Laya Gasa trek. While the crew are sorting loads and loading ponies we can take a walk to the Dzong. The trail heads up the Paro Chhu valley passing traditional Bhutanese farmhouses and cultivated fields. Tonight we camp for the night at Sharna.

Day 5. Trek to Soi Thangthanka (3,510m)- 6 to 7 hours walking.

From Sharna camp the trail continues through rhododendron and blue pine forests. The trail is normally quite muddy in places so it is a good idea to use trekking poles and to wear gaiters. Tonight we camp in a clearing in the forest at Soi Thangthanka.



Day 6. Trek to Jangothang (4,080m)- 5 to 6 hours walking.

After an hour or so from camp we leave the forest as we climb above the tree line into a beautiful valley. Arriving at Jangothang camp there is a superb view of Mt Chomolhari next the ruins of an old Dzong that used guard Bhutan against invasions from Tibet.

Day 7. Acclimatisation day at Jangothang (4,080m).

In order to help the acclimatisation process it is a good idea to go for a walk in the morning to higher altitude (“climb high, sleep low”). There are a number of options for a morning walk including walking up a ridge to the north for good views of Mt Jitchu Drake or to walk to the twin lakes at Tsho Phu (4,350m).

Day 8. Trek to Lingshi (4,150m) crossing Nyile La (4,890m)- 6 hours walking.

Today we cross the first of the major passes, the Nyile La pass at 4,890m. It is a steady ascent to the pass on a good trail. There are views of Mt Takaphu (6,526m) to the north and Tiger Mountain to the east.

Day 9. Trek to Chebisa (3,850m)- 4 hours walking.

After we will visit the Lingshi Dzong and then on to Lingshi. On leaving the village the trail contours high above the valley passing through hillsides covered with medicinal plants and flowers. After passing a ridge with some prayer flags, we descend into a side valley to a beautiful village called Goyok. Another hour further we arrive to Chebisa village located in a valley with a waterfall at one end.

Day 10. Trek to Shomuthang (3,950m) crossing Gombu La (4,400m)- 5 to 6 hours walking.

After crossing the Gombu La we descend through a hillside of rhododendrons to Shomuthang where we camp for the night.

Day 11. Trek to Robulathang (4,410m) crossing Jhare La (4,780m)- 7 hours walking.

After an early start we climb towards the Jhare La pass where there are good views of Tiger Mountain, Mt Jitchu Drake, Takaphu and Kang Bum. Descending from the pass we arrive to Tsharijathang where herds of Takin (national animal of Bhutan) can be seen at certain times of the year.



Day 12. Trek to Limithang (4,160m) crossing the Shinge La (5,000m).

After a long climb to the Shinge La at 5,000m we are rewarded with stunning views of mountains, including the spectacular Tiger Mountain at the head of the valley.

Day 13. Trek to Laya (3,700m)- 4 to 5 hours walking.

Today we walk through forest alongside the river to the largest village on the trek. The Layap women wear distinctive conical bamboo hats with turquoise and jade jewellery.

Day 14. Trek to camp (3,700m) below Bale La- 8 hours walking.

It is a long walk today to our camp below the Bale La. The trail descends from Laya to the army post at Taksaka, not far from here is the turn off for Lunana whereas we continue along the path towards Punakha.

Day 15. Trek to Gasa, cross the Bale La (3,800m)- 6 hours walking.

After ascending the Bale La we descend through forest to Gasa Dzong, then further along to Gasa Tsachu (hot springs).

Day 16. Trek to roadhead, drive to Thimphu- 6 hours walking.

The trail continues down the Mo Chu valley and after climbing a ridge we enter cultivated fields and villages. After Damji it takes a couple of hours to the roadhead, from we drive back to Thimphu over the Dochu La.

Day 17. Sightseeing in Thimphu, drive to Paro.

Today we will organise a sightseeing tour of Thimphu, you can see thakin in the outdoor zoo, Dzong, thangka painting school or Butanese paper factory. It is worth wondering around Thimphu and watching archery competition in the afternoon.

Day 18. Fly to Kathmandu.

After the spectacular flight back to Kathmandu the rest of the day you are free to relax in Kathmandu or to go shopping, normally groups will meet up in the evening for a farewell meal. **Overnight at Hotel Tibet.**

Day 19. Fly back home.

Transfers to Kathmandu airport for flights back home.



ETHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Mountain Company is committed to adopting a responsible attitude to the areas we visit. We are guests of the communities visited and with some thought and care we can ensure that everyone benefits from the experience.

We work closely with the International Porter Protection Group (www.ippg.net) who we support as a Camp 1 sponsor- we abide by their 5 guidelines for porter protection.

We also work with other organisations such as Climate Care (www.climatecare.org), Tourism Concern (www.tourismconcern.org.uk), Friends of Conservation (www.foc-uk.com) and Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (www.keepnepal.org).

We have developed a Responsible Tourism policy which aims to ensure that The Mountain Company and its clients act in a way that is socially, environmentally and culturally sound.

The Mountain Company has joined the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Know Before You Go campaign. The aim is to make sure travellers are properly prepared before travelling overseas. The best way to get the FCO latest advice is to visit their website at: www.fco.gov.uk/travel.





PRACTICAL INFORMATION

ALTITUDE AND ACCLIMATISATION

Our Laya Gasa itinerary has been designed for gradual acclimatisation to take place. There are ways of helping the acclimatisation process, as described below:

- Walk slowly: there is plenty of time included in the itinerary so there is no need to rush, go at your own pace and enjoy the incredible views!
- Drink lots of water: it is easier for your body to acclimatise when hydrated so drink water and avoid coffee, tea and alcohol.
- Consider taking diamox (acetazolamide): before using this drug we recommend consulting a doctor and thoroughly researching the pros and cons.

For further information we suggest you take a look at the following websites:

Base Camp MD website:

<http://www.BaseCampmd.com/expguide/highalt.shtml>

High Altitude medicine website:

<http://www.high-altitude-medicine.com>

Medex Travel at High Altitude:

<http://www.medex.org.uk/v26%20booklet.pdf>

BMC website:

<http://www.thebmc.co.uk/Feature.aspx?id=1746>

ACCOMMODATION IN KATHMANDU

In Kathmandu we use Hotel Tibet (three star). The hotel is located close to the British Embassy near to the centre of Kathmandu. It is also within walking distance to the tourist hub of Thamel.



ACCOMMODATION IN BHUTAN

Tourist accommodation in Bhutan is comfortable but can be fairly basic especially as you travel further east. Most hotels in the main tourist destinations have rooms with private bathrooms, hot water (at least at some stage during the day), telephone and electricity. Plumbing is not always up to the standard you may be used to and there are no hotels with central heating although heaters of some sort will generally be provided.

Tourist hotels tend to provide meals buffet-style which gives you the opportunity to try a variety of Bhutanese dishes. In the larger hotels a la carte service is also available, although they do not always have everything on the menu. Thimphu has a pizza restaurant (the Seasons) and there is a good café in the centre of Thimphu (near the Swiss bakery) called the Art Café which serves sandwiches, cake and filter coffee.

Please note that there is currently a shortage of hotel accommodation in Bhutan especially during festivals or the peak trekking season of October. We reserve rooms at all hotels in advance but the bookings are never certain until the group check in on the day. Bearing this in mind we will reserve rooms in the following hotels:

Paro: Dechen Hill Resort or Silverpine Hotel

Thimphu: Peaceful Resort or Hotel Pedling.

Punakha/Wangdue: Tashiling Hotel or Dragon Nest Resort

Bumthang: Hotel Mipham or Garden Hotel.

DRUK AIR FLIGHT

The Druk Air flight to/ from Paro is notoriously unreliable with the final timetable often published very late. The itinerary is based on the latest schedules but it is subject to change. Flights can also be cancelled at the last minute with no alternative offered. In this situation we might have to drive to or from Paro.



Passengers in Executive Class (J class) are entitled to a maximum of 30 kg, and those in Economy Class (Y class) are entitled to a maximum of 20 kg.

A TYPICAL DAY ON TREK

The day starts with an early morning mug of tea brought to your tent by one of the cook's helpers. Before heading over to the mess tent for breakfast it is best to pack your overnight gear into your duffel bag. During breakfast the tents will be packed away and, after the porters have arranged their loads, they will set off on the trail in the cool of the morning.

After breakfast, probably between 7am and 8am, we start walking. The pace of the trek is leisurely with plenty of time to enjoy the scenery, take photos and explore the local villages. Lunch will be around 11am at a spot by the side of the trail and is prepared for us by the cooks.

There is more walking after lunch and normally you will get into camp by mid afternoon with the tents already put up by the local staff. In the evening a three course meal is served in the mess tent around 7pm. After supper the western leader will discuss the plan for the next day with the group. People might stay in the mess tent chatting about the day's events for a while before retiring to their tent for the night.

FOOD

In Kathmandu there is a wide range of excellent restaurants close to the hotel.

While on the trek you will get breakfast with porridge and cereal, toast or chapattis, omelettes and a range of hot drinks. Normally a hot lunch is prepared by the trek crew or on the longer days a pack lunch is provided after breakfast. On arrival at the camp in the afternoon you will be given tea and biscuits and a three course meal will follow later in the evening.

We bring along fresh vegetables for the main meals. We also provide a supply of chocolate bars and nuts.



CLIMATE AND WEATHER

The traditional trekking seasons in Bhutan are late September to November and March to May with October generally recognised as having the best weather. Spring is also a popular time of year with warmer weather and the advantage of seeing spring flowers and rhododendrons in bloom.

This trek will have a wide range of temperatures depending on the altitude and the time of day. In the mountains between 1,000m and 3,500m the nights will be cool, normally around 5°C, and during the day temperatures sometimes rise to 25°C. At higher altitudes temperatures range from about 15°C to -20°C.

CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

A list of suggested clothing and equipment for the Laya Gasa trek has been included in Appendix below. This is a comprehensive list and experienced trekkers will often take only a selection of these items based on what has worked in the past. It is worth pointing out that you will need a sleeping bag for this trip.

If you do not have the clothing and equipment contained in this list then a good option might be to rent from the UK. Trek Hire is a company that rents out high quality items at competitive prices which would save you the expense of buying. The link to their website is <http://www.trekhireuk.com/>

Alternatively if you are going to buy then please contact the office for the Cotswold Outdoor promo code that entitles you, as a client of The Mountain Company, to a 15% discount in their stores and online.

Each trekker should bring one backpack for items required during the day. Your day backpack will contain items such as warm clothes, jacket, camera, water bottles, personal first aid kit and snacks.

The rest of your personal equipment packed in a duffel bag or backpack will be carried by a porter. **The maximum weight allowance is 15kgs.** Please ensure that your bag is marked clearly on the outside for easy identification.



VISA REQUIREMENTS

Bhutan visa

The Mountain Company team will obtain your Bhutan visa. We will send you a copy of the confirmation from the Bhutanese Department of Tourism showing that your visa has been authorised. Your actual visa will be issued on arrival at Paro.

Nepal visa

A transit visa can be obtained from immigration on arrival to Kathmandu airport for a period of 48 hours on the presentation of your onward airline ticket. The fee for the transit visa is US\$5.

VACCINATIONS AND MEDICAL

You should obtain professional advice from a travel clinic or your local GP about which vaccinations to have before you arrive in Nepal. A dental check-up is a good idea as there will be no dental facilities while on the trek.

We bring a comprehensive first aid kit from UK (Life Systems Mountain Leader) plus high altitude medicine, antibiotics and other medicines.

FLIGHTS

We recommend Max Travel (ATOL bonded license# 4705) for booking international flights and other travel arrangements. Please take a look at their website at <http://www.maxtravel.co.uk/> or give them a call on 020 7095 0920.

There are a number of good online agents that we also recommend, they are:

Kayak: *an excellent flight cost comparison website* <http://www.kayak.co.uk/>

Traveljungle: *another good flight cost comparison website*
<http://www.traveljungle.co.uk/>

Cheap Tickets: this site quotes fares in USD\$ & often is very competitive when translated back to GBP£ <http://www.cheaptickets.com/>



Southall Travel: very competitive prices for India, Pakistan and Nepal both online and telephone support <http://www.southalltravel.co.uk/>

INSURANCE

Travel insurance for any Mountain Company itinerary is a condition of booking a holiday. At the very least you should have emergency medical and repatriation insurance which must include the cost of mountain rescue. Cancellation insurance is strongly recommended as all deposits paid to The Mountain Company are non-refundable.

To get an online quote for your personal travel and trekking insurance (UK residents only), take a look at Snowcard's website at http://www.snowcard.co.uk/pages/d_select1.asp?referrer_id=MC

The Snowcard activity level for Laya Gasa trek is 3 and prices start from £70.



Please note that The Mountain Company do not act as an agent of Snowcard Insurance and any policy bought via this web link is effected directly with Snowcard Insurance Services Limited.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Royal Government of Bhutan has a strict policy to preserve its cultural and traditional values. For example antiques may not be taken out of the country and they request that clients do not give sweets, pens, etc., to children or distribute medicine to villagers.



SUGGESTED READING

Please take a look at The Mountain Company's bookstore for a wide selection of books and maps to Nepal, the link is at: <http://astore.amazon.co.uk/themountainco-21>

- Pocket Guide to the Birds of Bhutan: Grimmett R, Inskipp C & T.
- Two and Two Halves to Bhutan: Peter Steele
- Bhutan – Land of the Peaceful Dragon: G.N. Mehra
- Bhutan, An Illustrated Guide: Françoise Pommaret, Odyssey Guides
- Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon: E.T. Owen, London 1998
- Pocket Guide to the Birds of Bhutan: Grimmett R, Inskipp C & T.
- Two and Two Halves to Bhutan: Peter Steele



APPENDIX 1

SUGGESTED CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT LIST

Footwear:

- Walking boots. A pair of water repellent boots with ankle support.
- Gaiters. A pair used to keep boots dry if walking through deep snow or on wet ground.
- Wool and liner socks.
- Trainers/sneakers or sandals. Can be used in camp/lodge in the evenings.

Clothing:

- Waterproof jacket and trousers (goretex or similar).
- Trekking trousers.
- Long sleeve shirts (not cotton).
- Micro fleece.
- Mid to heavyweight fleece.
- Sleeveless or body warmer type fleece.
- Thermals or base layer for top & bottom (merino wool or synthetic).
- Fleece pants.
- Medium weight down jacket.

Handwear:

- Fleece gloves.
- Warm mittens and/or gloves.

**Headwear:**

- Wool or fleece hat.
- Sun hat.
- Bandana or scarf.
- Headtorch. Bring extra batteries.
- Sunglasses.

Personal Equipment:

- Sleeping bag.
- Backpack large enough to carry water bottles, camera, lunch and extra clothing.
- Stuff sacks for keeping your gear dry and organised.
- Two water bottles (Nalgene wide mouth bottles are the best).
- Sunscreen and lipsalve with a high SPF.
- Insect repellent.
- Water purification tablets (Pristine, Biox Acqua or Acqa Mira).
- Favourite snack food.
- Books, ipod and cards etc.
- Trekking poles.
- Camera with spare batteries and memory cards.
- Insurance certificate.
- Earplugs (optional).
- Baby wipes (optional).
- Hand sanitizer (optional)
- Travelling:



- Duffle bag or large backpack for your personal gear on the trek (carried by a porter). Bring a small combination padlock to secure the bag.
- Travel clothes. You will need casual clothing for air travel days and time spent in Kathmandu, Paro and Thimphu.
- Toiletry bag include toilet paper, soap, towel, toothbrush, etc.

Personal first aid kit:

Note: we provide a comprehensive group first aid kit but please bring personal medications and other items you might use regularly such as:

- Any personal medications.
- Malaria prophylactic tablets.
- Blister treatment (Compeed patches are the best).
- Rehydration powder eg Dioralyte.
- Analgesics (paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin).
- Plasters and zinc oxide tape.
- Throat lozenges.
- Diamox (helps with acclimatisation).



APPENDIX 2

INTERNATIONAL PASSENGER PROTECTION

In accordance with "The Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992" all passengers booking with The Mountain Trekking Company Ltd ("The Mountain Company") are fully protected for the initial deposit and subsequently the balance of all monies paid to us, including repatriation if required, arising from cancellation or curtailment of your travel arrangements due to the insolvency of The Mountain Company.

There is no requirement for Financial Protection of day trips, and none is provided. This insurance is only valid for packages booked that DO NOT include flights.

Consumer aware: Your booking is insured by IPP Ltd and its panel of insurers. This insurance is only valid for passengers who book and pay directly with/to The Mountain Company. If you have booked and/ or paid direct to a Travel Agent for a holiday with The Mountain Company please request proof of how the booking is secured as this will not be covered by IPP Ltd in this instance. For further information please go to www.ipplondon.co.uk

This Insurance has been arranged by International Passenger Protection Limited and underwritten by Insurers who are members of the Association of British Insurers & Lloyds Syndicates.

Claim procedures: download claim form from www.ipplondon.co.uk, any occurrence which may give rise to a claim should be advised within 14 days to: International Passenger Protection Limited, Claims Office, IPP House, 22-26 Station Road, West Wickham, Kent BR4 0PR, United Kingdom. Telephone: +44 (0) 208 7763752. Fax: +44 (0) 208 7763751.

In order to deal promptly with any claims hereunder it is essential that you retain all bills, receipts and other documents relating to your travel arrangements. Claims forms must be submitted to IPP within six months of date of insolvency they cannot consider or pay claims received after this date.