

# LUXURY CLASSIC TOUR OF BHUTAN



**COUNTRIES VISITED:** BHUTAN

**TRIP TYPE:** Cultural Tour

**TRIP GRADE:** Easy

**TRIP STYLE:** Hotel

**NAN Based On 0 Reviews**

**KG Carbon Footprint**

**TRIP LEADER:** Local Leader

**GROUP SIZE:** 2 - 10 people

**NEXT DEPARTURE:** 02 May 2024

**11 Trees Planted for each Booking**

Our Luxury Classic Tour of Bhutan is an in depth tour to this fascinating country while staying at the best hotels in each location. You have time to visit Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Trongsa, Bumthang and Phobjikha Valley.

Throughout this itinerary you stay at best available hotels, they are as follows: Thimphu at Le Meridien Hotel or Taj Tashi; Punakha at Uma by Como; Phobjikha at Gangtey Goenpa Lodge; Bumthang at Aman Kora and Paro at Zhiwa Ling.

We can arrange for your tour to coincide with one of the main festivals (Tsechus). Tsechus are annual religious Bhutanese festivals of Drukpa Buddhism held in each district or dzongkhag of Bhutan.

There are superb views of the Himalaya from Druk Air flight to and from Paro and also on a clear day from Dochu La pass between Thimphu and Punakha. There is no day to day trekking in this itinerary however there are opportunities for day walks while in Paro, Thimphu, Bumthang and Phobjikha Valley.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Bhutan visa.

- All transfers including airport collections in Paro.
- Twin share or double rooms at all places on the itinerary.
- All meals and mineral water included while in Bhutan.
- All tour arrangements including Bhutanese guide (English speaking trained and licensed by the Department of Tourism).
- Private vehicle and driver.
- All entry fees to museums and sites where applicable.
- Full financial protection for all monies paid to us through our membership of Association of Bonded Travel Operators Trust (our ABTOT membership number is 5365) and having an Air Travel Organiser's Licence (our ATOL number is 10921).
- 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 Pre Trip Information" notes.

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flight to/from Paro.
- Travel insurance.
- Use of bar and beverages in hotel, laundry, telephone calls or internet and personal shopping.
- Tips to your guide and driver.
- Other items not listed in "What is included".

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1: FLY TO PARO, DRIVE TO THIMPHU

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Arrive in Paro

Drive to Thimphu (1 hour)

Sightseeing in Thimphu

Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Taj Tashi in Deluxe room

On a clear day the flight to Paro is sensational with views of the Himalaya to the north. Upon arrival our guide will receive you at the airport and drive you through the hamlets of Paro along the riverside to Thimphu the capital city of Bhutan. You will immediately notice the unique architecture and Bhutanese lifestyle with many people wearing traditional clothes (men wear the 'Gho' and women 'Kira').

The drive from Paro to Thimphu takes about one hour, on reaching Thimphu you will check into the hotel. Depending on your arrival time and how you feel after your long journey, if you wish in the afternoon you can explore some of the sights of Thimphu.

### DAY 2: SIGHTSEEING IN THIMPHU

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Sightseeing in Thimphu

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Taj Tashi in Deluxe room

You can discuss with your guide where you would like to visit in and around Thimphu. There are several

places to see and the most popular are the Thimphu Dzong, Takin sanctuary (Takin is the national animal of Bhutan with the head of a goat and body of a bull), folk heritage museum, the textile weaving center and the Institute of Arts and Crafts.

### **DAY 3: DRIVE TO PUNAKHA OVER DOCHU LA (3,050M)**

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Drive to Punakha (2 hours)

Sightseeing in Punakha

Uma by Como in Punakha

Today we leave for Punakha which is the old winter capital of Bhutan. En route we drive over the Dochu La pass at an altitude of 3,050m known as one of the finest viewpoints of Eastern Himalaya. On a clear day you can see the peaks Masangang, Tsendagang, Terigang and Gangkar Punsum (the highest unclimbed mountain in the world). On arrival to Dochu La you can get out of the car to admire the view and walk around the 108 chortens marking the summit of the pass. We then descend through beautiful forest into the Punakha Valley at an altitude of 1,350m.

Before reaching Punakha we visit Chimi Lhakang also known as the fertility temple of Bhutan. Lama Drukpa Kunley, who was a highly unorthodox Buddhist saint, deeds form the basis of many local legends blesses the monastery. The temple is fondly regarded by local families as a potent fertility shrine. It takes about 20 minutes to walk across rice fields to reach the temple.

On the way to your hotel we drive past Punakha Dzong, this is an impressive building and is located at the confluence of the Pho Chhu (father) and Mo Chhu (mother) rivers in the Punakha valley. If we have time we will visit the Dzong if not we will certainly go tomorrow. This dzong is the second largest in Bhutan and was constructed by Ngawang Namgyal, 1st Zhabdrung Rinpoche, in 1637-38 so it is also the second oldest.

### **DAY 4: SIGHTSEEING IN PUNAKHA**

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Sightseeing in Punakha

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Uma by Como in Punakha

There are a number of options for more places to explore in Punakha valley. For a good view of the valley you can walk up to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal chorten perched on a hill above Mo Chhu river. It takes about 45 minutes to walk up to the chorten after crossing the suspension bridge over the river.

### **DAY 5: DRIVE TO PHOBJIKHA VALLEY IN GANGTEY**

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Drive to Phobjikha valley (5 hours)

Sightseeing in Phobjikha valley

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Gangtey Lodge

Drive to the beautiful Phobjikha valley, this place is home to the endangered Black-necked cranes that

migrate every year to this valley in winter. Phobjika valley is accessible by road and after crossing Lawala Pass at 3,360m the road descends to Phobjika valley at an altitude of 2,900m. Phobjika is often called Gangtey after the name of the monastery in this valley.

Phobjika is located on the north western edge of Jigme Singye Wangchuk National Park and is protected due to its ecological significance and rich natural heritage. Phobjika valley has the largest wetland in Bhutan and is habitat to about 300 Black-necked cranes that migrate in winter from their breeding grounds in Tibet. On arrival to Phobjika we suggest you walk along the Gangtey Nature Trail with views onto the wetlands where you will hopefully see Black-necked cranes in their roosting grounds. At end of the nature trail you will meet up with your transport for the drive up to the Black-necked cranes visitor centre.

## **DAY 6: EXPLORE PHOBJIKA VALLEY**

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Sightseeing in Phobjika valley

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Gangtey Lodge

The valley is a good place for day hikes as it offers numerous places to walk through villages. Or just relax in the stunning hotel located with a wonderful view of the valley.

## **DAY 7: DRIVE TO BUMTHANG VIA TRONGSA**

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Drive to Bumthang (7 hours)

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Aman Bumthang

Today we drive to Trongsa for lunch with the road taking us over two passes and the small town of Wangdue. From Nobding the road ascends sharply to Pele La pass at 3,300m before descending through pastureland at Sephu where we reach the historical Chendebji Chorten. The road has lots of bends, beautiful waterfalls and thick forest cover on the way and this part of the ride offers good view of the south Trongsa Valley and stunning views of the Trongsa Dzong. We will visit the Trongsa Dzong and the museum

After lunch we drive onto Bumthang and en route we will pass villages and cross the Yutong La Pass at 3,400m before descending into the beautiful Bumthang Valley. Bumthang is known as the Switzerland of Bhutan. In the 1980's several Swiss from the NGO Helvetas came to Bumthang to develop the forestry industry in Bumthang, Bumthang also looks like the Swiss alps in many ways with the traditional farmhouses and milking cows.

## **DAY 8: SIGHTSEEING AROUND BUMTHANG**

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Sightseeing in Bumthang

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Aman Punakha

There is lots to do in Bumthang valley you can visit the Swiss farm, the Jambay Lhakhang monastery,

Tamshing Monastery and the Kurgye Monastery, one of the most holy sites for Buddhists. Many royal family and high ranking lamas have their funeral in this monastery premises. There are several walking trails around the valley or you can be driven to the main sites.

## **DAY 9: FLY FROM BUMTHANG TO PARO**

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Fly to Paro (45 minutes)

Sightseeing in Paro

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Zhiwa Ling in Paro

In the morning you take the short flight from Bumthang airport to Paro. On reaching Paro valley visit the Paro Dzong and the national museum.

## **DAY 10: MORNING WALK TO TAKTSANG MONASTERY (TIGER'S NEST)**

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Walking for 9km (4 hours)

Sightseeing in Paro

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Zhiwa Ling in Paro

After breakfast we will organise an optional walk up to the Taktsang monastery known as the "Tiger's Nest". It takes about 3 to 4 hours to walk through pine forest and up to the monastery perched on a cliff overlooking the valley. Lunch will be served in the viewpoint cafeteria.

We will also arrange sightseeing where we visit Kichu monastery which is one of the oldest monasteries in Bhutan built in the 7th century by the Tibetan King Songsten Genpo who built 108 monasteries around the region. Also visit the Drugyal Dzong at the end of the valley.

## **DAY 11: FLY BACK HOME**

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Fly home

Breakfast

Transfers to Paro airport for flight back home.

## **DATES & PRICES**

## **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

Kit List

## **CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT LIST FOR BHUTAN TOURS**

**Footwear:**



- Comfortable shoes i.e trail shoes or trainers.
- Flip flops or sandals.

**Travel clothes. You will need clothing as follows:**

- Lightweight waterproof jacket.
- Casual long sleeved shirt with collar (for visits to Dzongs).
- T shirts.
- Lightweight trousers.
- Micro fleece.
- Socks and underwear etc.
- Swim wear

Please carefully read Ethics and Etiquette paragraph for dress code when visiting Dzongs.

**Headwear:**

- Sun hat.
- Bandana or face mask (eg. [Buff Headwear](#) or purchase a [#myTMCbuff](#)).

**Personal Equipment:**

- Toiletry bag include toilet paper, soap, towel, toothbrush, etc.
- Headtorch. Useful during power cuts.
- Backpack for day trips. Recommended size is 15 to 20 litres.
- Water bottle.
- Sunscreen and lipsalve with a high SPF.
- Insect repellent.
- Books, phone and cards etc.
- Power adapter.
- Camera with spare batteries and memory cards.
- Insurance certificate.
- Hand sanitizer. We suggest you keep this in your day pack.
- Duffle bag (or backpack) for your personal gear. Bring a small combination padlock to secure the bag.

**Personal first aid kit:**

Please bring personal medications and other items you might use regularly such as:

- Any personal medications.
- Insect repellent.
- Plasters and blister treatment (Compeed patches are the best).
- Anti-septic cream.
- Analgesics (paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin).
- Throat lozenges.
- Diarrhoea treatment (Immodium) and oral rehydration salts (Dioralyte).
- Antihistamine cream and tablets (Cetirizine or loratidine)
- Multi vitamin tablets.

Cultural information

**DRESS CODE AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENTERING DZONGS**

It is important to follow the dress code for dzongs, monasteries and lhakhangs. Use the details below to assist with your planning for the trip. We understand when on trek you will have fewer smart clothes with you. Your guide will discuss each days visits with you to reconfirm appropriate attire.

- Go for smart casual look such as long sleeved shirt with collar i.e no T shirts or short sleeved shirts.
- Full length trousers or long skirts (ankles must be covered) i.e no shorts,  $\frac{3}{4}$  length trousers or short skirts.
- Shoes with socks covering ankles i.e no sandals or slippers.
- No hats and umbrellas allowed.
- Photographs are only allowed in the courtyard of most monasteries.

- Walk around Buddhist temples or stupas in a clockwise direction.
- Turn off your mobile/ cell phone and talk in a quiet tone.
- It is customary to give a small donation when visiting a monastery.

## ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE IN BHUTAN

The Royal Government of Bhutan has a policy to preserve its cultural values.

- Lakes in Bhutan are holy and inhabited by spirits. No fishing, swimming or throwing stones.
- Do not disturb or feed wildlife or do anything to destroy their natural habitat.
- Do not use detergent in or near rivers. For personal washing use biodegradable soap at least 50m from any watercourse.
- Do not give sweets, pens or gifts to children or distribute medicine to villagers. There are Basic Health Units operated by Bhutan Government throughout the country.
- Do not buy local household items or religious artefacts from villagers. Antiques may not be taken out of the country.
- Please respect the culture and traditions of local people. This includes trek crew, villagers and pack animal owners.

## ACCOMMODATION

### HOTEL ZHIWA LING IN PARO



Hotel Zhiwa Ling has been designed in traditional Bhutanese style with hand-carved wooden cornices and stonework and is set in 10 acres of attractive gardens. This hotel is one of the few Bhutanese-owned luxury hotels in the country and has been rated as 5 star by the Tourism Council of Bhutan

There are 45 rooms comprising of Junior Suites, One bedroom Suites and the King Raven Suite. For our tours we use Junior Suite, these spacious rooms have 49 metres squared and include a sitting area with leather sofas and a private balcony. The bathrooms have a full size bath tub with shower. There is complementary wifi and tea & coffee making facilities in the rooms. There are two restaurants with Bhutanese and international cuisine. The bar is called Mad Monk Bar. Other facilities include spa, a fitness centre, sauna, steam room as well as a traditional Bhutanese outdoor hot-stone bath. There is a business centre, Tea House and a Meditation House.



## TAJ TASHI IN THIMPU



Taj Tashi is part of Taj group of hotels, was built in 2008 and designed to blend Bhutan's traditional Dzong with modern architecture. This hotel is located in the centre of Thimphu and allows guests to explore the capital city of Bhutan on foot.

Their 66 rooms and suites are spacious and decorated in traditional Bhutan style with Buddhist murals. The hotel has four restaurants that combine Bhutanese with Tibetan and European cuisines. There is a spa featuring a 'Bhutanese Hot Stone Bath' and also sauna, Jacuzzi, indoor heated swimming pool and fitness centre.



## UMA BY COMO IN PUNAKHA



Uma by Como is located at the far western end of the lush Punakha Valley overlooking a bend in the Mo Chu river. Their 11 rooms, suites and private villas have been designed as a blend of traditional Bhutanese style with contemporary style.

With this small number of rooms Uma by COMO, Punakha has been conceived as an intimate, luxury retreat with excellent service and friendly staff. There is a good restaurant and COMO Shambhala Spa.

## **GANGTEY LODGE IN PHOBJIKHA VALLEY**



Gangtey Lodge is an exceptional property opened in September 2013 and is located with wonderful views over Gangtey valley.

The hotel was designed by Mary Lou Thomson who has worked on a number of prestigious design projects. The building was inspired by the traditional wood and stone farmhouses of Bhutan and has incorporated the highest level of style and comfort. In the communal area there are sofas and comfortable chairs around two fireplaces and long dining tables for sharing meals with other guests. There are floor to ceiling windows and an outside terrace with views of the valley. The manager gives a warm welcome and you will be well looked after by his friendly team offering the highest level of service.

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**AMANKORA BUMTHANG IN JAKAR**

Amankora Bumthang (Jakar) is the most easterly and newest Aman properties in Bhutan. Amankora has been named by combining aman, the Sanskrit-derived word for 'peace', and kora or 'circular pilgrimage' in Dzongkha, the Bhutanese language.

Amankora Bumthang has been built using natural materials and there is an impressive dzong-inspired hallway at the entrance that opens onto a Library and a comfortable Living Room appointed with lounge chairs, daybeds and a traditional bukhari. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer views of a landscaped courtyard adjoining the shared Palace grounds. Adjacent is the Dining Room with its soaring ceiling. Outdoor dining areas under the shade of local fruit trees are also provided in the courtyard. The Spa offers three treatment rooms and a steam room.

**Notes downloaded on: 02-05-2024**

