

9 Days – Into the Heartland of Bhutan

BHUTAN ■ PARO – THIMPHU – PHOBJIKHA – PUNAKHA - BUMTHANG



Type: Classic

Tour Overview

Day 01: Arrive at Paro International Airport and Drive to Thimphu

Welcome to Bhutan, the Land of the Thunder Dragon - a deeply Buddhist land shrouded in mystery and magic. On arrival at Paro Airport the representative will meet you and drive to Thimphu.

Thimphu is the country's capital – a town of small shopping complexes, monasteries and chalet-like apartment buildings that back onto pine-covered hills.

After lunch visit:

- **Buddha Point/ Kuensel Phodrang** – High in the hills, the largest Buddha statue in the country sits overlooking the Thimphu Valley.
- **Memorial Chorten** - Built in the year 1974 in the memory of the third king of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Watch the locals as they spin the prayer wheels and walk three times around the monument.
- **Tashichho Dzong** - The “fortress of the glorious religion” was built in 1641 and subsequently rebuilt in the 1960s. Tashichho Dzong houses some ministries, His Majesty's secretariat, and the central monk body.



Day 02: Thimphu – Sightseeing

- **Changangkha Lhakhang** - Located above Thimphu Valley, this temple and monastic school was established in the 12th century on a site chosen by Lama Phajo Drugom Shigpo.
- **Motithang Takin Preserve** – Meet the Takin – the rare national animal of Bhutan! It is a vulnerable species found only in Bhutan, Nepal and Burma.
- **Traditional Medicine Institute** - In Bhutan, equal emphasis is given to both allopathic and traditional medicines. Rich herbal medicines made up from medicinal plants are prepared and dispensed here.
- **Folk Heritage Museum** - The house replicates a traditional farmhouse and is furnished, as it would have been about a century ago.
- **National Institute for Zorig Chusum** – At this school of arts and crafts students undertake a six-year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan.

Day 03: Thimphu – Punakha

After breakfast drive to Punakha - approximately three hours drive through picturesque valleys and mountain slopes dotted with typical Bhutanese villages. From the Dochula pass, at over 10,000ft, panoramic views of the high snowcapped peaks of the Bhutanese Himalayas can be enjoyed on a clear day.

Just before Punakha, a half hour walk through a local village and rice field brings you to **Chhimi Lhakhang**, a temple of fertility founded in the 15th century by a monk known as the Divine Mad Man! Learn all about the colourful history of this unconventional monk.

Punakha is the ancient capital of Bhutan and sits in a fertile and beautiful valley at the junction of the Mo Chhu (Mother River) and Pho Chhu (Father River). Commanding the river junction is the gorgeous **Punakha Dzong**, perhaps Bhutan's most impressive building. Explore the interior of this 17th century dzong encased in towering whitewashed walls.



Day 04: Punakha – Phobjikha

After breakfast set off to Phobjikha, a bowl-shaped glacial valley on the western slopes of the Black Mountains and an important wildlife preserve. On arrival visit **Gantey Goenpa**, an old monastery dating back to the 16th century. Stretch your legs with a soft trek around the peaceful valley, the winter home of the rare black-necked cranes, which migrate here during winter.

Day 05: Phobjikha – Bumthang

Set off on a road trip to Jakar (Bumthang) – a long, but memorable drive along a road carved out of the mountain faces (occasional road blocks may occur). View the dramatic landscapes of terraced farmland, deep river valleys and precariously perched traditional houses.

After a brief stop at **Chendebji Chorten**, which according to belief was built to cover the remains of a demon spirit, carry on to Trongsa - the original home of the Royal Family.

Visit **Trongsa Dzong** built in 1648. This commanding dzong is perched on the top of a ridge with a sheer drop to the south that often just disappears into cloud and mist. The **Tower of Trongsa**, a watchtower overlooking the dzong houses a museum telling the history of the monarchy.

The drive onward to Bumthang goes over the picturesque Yotong La.



Day 06: Bumthang

After breakfast, visit:

Wangdichhoeling Palace - a past home to the 2nd King, and now home to auspicious prayer wheels.

Kurjey Lhakhang – situated further up the valley, this is considered one of Bhutan's most auspicious monuments and was once the resting place of Guru Rimpoche (who flew to the site of the Tiger's Nest Monastery!).

Jambay Lhakhang – a sacred monastery built in the 7th century. It is home to the early winter festivals that draw thousands of Bhutanese for their annual blessings.

Tamshing Monastery – the sin alleviating monastery.

Cottage Industries - Red Panda Brewery, Bumthang Cheese/Dairy Facility and the Bumthang Distillery to see how local beer, cheese and spirits are made.

Day 7: Bumthang – Paro

After breakfast, board the plane to Paro, a short flight of about 30 minutes.

Paro is a charming town on the banks of the Paro (or Pa) Chhu. The main street is lined with colourfully painted wooden shopfronts and restaurants.

On arrival visit:

- **Kyichu Lhakhang** - One of the oldest and most sacred temples in the kingdom, dating back to the 7th century.
- **Ta Dzong** – The former Watch Tower which now houses the National Museum.
- **Rinpung Dzong** - The massive buttressed walls of this impressive dzong tower over the town and are visible throughout the valley. A Typical Bhutanese wooden roofed bridge leads from the dzong to Paro town.



Day 08: Paro - Excursion to Taktsang (Tiger's Nest)

Undoubtedly the highlight of Bhutan! The Tiger's Nest Monastery is one of Bhutan's most incredible sights, miraculously perched on the side of a sheer cliff 900m above the floor of the Paro valley.

The hike up to the monastery takes about 5 hours (round trip) and is well worth the effort. The trail follows an ancient path marked by river-powered prayer wheels with incredible views. It is said that a legendary saint, Guru Rinpoche, flew from Tibet on the back of a tigress to tame five demons, and this is where they landed. Hence the name, Tiger's Nest. Within the monastery is the cave where Guru Rinpoche meditated; an oil lamp chapel; and a holy spring.

After descending, if time permits, visit Drugyel Dzong. From here, the Jomolhari Peak (Mountain of the Goddess) can be seen on a clear day.

Day 09: Paro - Departure

Sadly, it's the last day and time to say goodbye to Bhutan. The guide will transfer you to Paro international airport for your onward flight.

TASHI DELEK!!!

Remark:

Due to occasional adverse weather conditions the flight from Bumthang to Paro may get cancelled. Should this occur, the journey to Paro will be by road (approx. 6 – 7 hours).

Highlights

- Uncover the mysteries of the sacred valleys in the heart of the Kingdom.
- Experience the beauty of Punakha Dzong – a divine monastery in an ancient capital.
- Climb to the Tiger’s Nest Monastery, perched precariously on the side of a cliff.

Duration

- 9D8N

Inclusions

- Sustainable Development Fee
- Accommodation in twin sharing basis
- All transportations and sightseeing within Bhutan
- Services of accompanied English-speaking guide
- Visa fee
- 3 meals a day
- Bottled water
- Entrance fees to the monuments

Exclusions

- Drinks
- Travel Insurance
- Airfare
- Excess baggage charges
- Any personal expenses