

## **CENTRAL BHUTAN (12 DAYS)**

(SAMPLE ITINERARY)

### **PARO – THIMPHU**

#### **DAY 1**

The flight to Paro is one of the most spectacular of all mountain flights. One can see Mt. Everest, Mt. Kanchanjunga, Mt. Makalu and other peaks in Bhutan such as Mt. Chomolhari, Mt. Jichu Drakay, and Mt. Tsheringang. The green wall of hills known as the doors, or gateways into Bhutan from the plains climbs continually higher as down the forested mountainsides, and to the north, the great snowcapped peaks of the inner Himalayas rise up to the sky. Our representative in Bhutan will receive you at the airport and be your guide throughout your tour. Transfer to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Check into hotel and free time to relax. Drive to the Takin Zoo, which houses the national animal, the Takin, a rare and bovid mammal that is unique to Bhutan. Drive further up to BBS tower for a view of the Thimphu valley.

Dinner and overnight in Thimphu.

### **THIMPHU**

#### **DAY 2**

In the morning visit the National folk Heritage Museum for an insight into the typical Bhutanese way of life. Tour the Traditional Painting School of Arts & Crafts – Zorig Chusum where children are taught centuries’ old crafts of painting, sculpture, sewing and embroidery. Visit the Traditional Medicine Center, which prepares and dispenses traditional herbal and other medicines. The National Textile Museum is worth a leisurely visit to learn about the living national art of weaving and to view master pieces of great weaving. Visit the Bhutan Post renowned for its beautiful stamps where every special event of the world is commemorated. Finally in the evening visit the Trashichhodzong – which dates back to the 13th century. Today it houses His Majesty’s Throne Room, several Government Ministries and is also home to the Monk Body.

Dinner and overnight in Thimphu.

### **THIMPHU – PUNAKHA**

#### **DAY 3**

Departing for Punakha, we begin our journey toward central Bhutan. We pass over 10,000ft Dochula Pass where 108 beautifully structured Druk Wangyal Chortens are located. Enjoy a photo stop here and view the high Eastern Himalayan Mountains. Many prayer flags encircle us, fluttering the prayer of peace and serenity in the fresh air on the Pass. Stop for a short tea break at the cafeteria. Today’s departure takes you through the dramatic Paro Chhu and Wang Chu River valleys on to the high mountain pass of Dochula. There is a powerful binocular telescope in the cafeteria. From west to east these are the different peaks with their elevation:

Kang Bum	6526 m
Gangchhenta	6840 m
Masang Gang	7165 m
Tsenda Gang	7100 m
Teri Gang	7300 m
Jejekangphu Gang	7100 m

Zongphu Gang (Table Mt.) 7100 m  
Gangkhar Puensum 7541 m (Highest mountain entirely in Bhutan)

Take a short walk to see the Chimi Lhakhang, built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley in 1499. He subdued the demoness of the Dochu La with his 'magic thunderbolt of wisdom'. A wooden effigy of the Lama's thunderbolt is preserved in the temple, and childless women go to the temple to receive a wang (blessing) from the Saint. It is believed that the Lama grants wishes for women wanting to have children. Check into hotel. Drive to see the impressive Punakha Dzong, the second of Bhutan's dzongs. For many years until the time of the second King, it served as the seat of the government. It is the winter residence of the monastic order's leader and his entourage of monks, and was built in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Inside the Dzong is the set of the 108 volumes of Kanjur – holy book of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage, written in gold. Bhutan's most treasured possession is the Rangjung Kharsapani, a self created image of Chenrigzig which is described by Shabdrung as a treasure as vast as the sky.

Dinner and overnight in Punakha.

## **PUNAKHA – TRONGSA**

## **DAY 4**

Today drive to Trongsa via Pele la pass at 3,150 meters. This is a wonderful opportunity for photographs. There will be plenty of stops to take photos and for refreshments. Commanding the Mangde Chu at an altitude of 2,200 meters rises the Trongsa Dzong one of the most impressive dzongs in Bhutan. Built in 1644 by the Shabdrung, the dzong is an architectural masterpiece.

Dinner and overnight at Trongsa.

## **TRONGSA – BUMTHANG**

## **DAY 5**

This is one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the heartland of Buddhism as it maintains the most sacred valleys in the Kingdom. Here the great teachers meditated and left in their wake many sacred sites. The Guru and his lineage of Tertons, treasure finders, have led to the sprouting of many temples in the valley. Arriving in the Bumthang valley you will drive through blue pine trees, note the beautiful clean stream along the roadside and pass small clusters of villages. You may also see yaks along the road as they graze in the lowlands during the winter months. Visit the Yatha weaving center and see the weavers at work. Yatha, patterned cloth made out of dyed sheep fleece, is produced in this region and is famous throughout Bhutan.

Check into Hotel.

Visit to Jakar Dzong, "castle of the white bird". According to legend, when the lamas assembled in about 1549 to select a site for a monastery, a big white bird rose suddenly in the air and settled on a spur of a hill. This was interpreted as an important omen, and the hill was chosen as the site for a monastery and for the Jakar Dzong. The fortress is now used as an administrative center of the valley and the summer residence of the Trongsa monks. Wangdichholing Palace was built in 1857 on the site of a battle camp of the Penlop of Trongsa, Jigme Namgyal. It was the first Palace that was not designed as a fortress. His son King Ugyen Wangchuk, chose it as his principal residence. Walk around Choskhor Valley where large fields of buckwheat cover the valley. The buckwheat noodles and pancakes are a Bumthang specialty. Visit the Sey Lhakhang or the Gold Temple established in 1963

where the central figure in the Lhakhang is Marpa Lotsawa, a great teacher of the Kagyu lineage.

Dinner and overnight in Bumthang.

## **BUMTHANG SIGHTSEEING**

## **DAY 6**

Jampa Lhakhang is believed to have been built in 659 by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. The central figure in the temple is Jampa, the Buddha of the Future. Inside the primary chapel are three stone steps representing ages. The first signifies the past, the age of the Historical Buddha Sakyamuni. This step has descended into the ground and is covered with a wooden plank. The next age is the present and its step is level with the floor. The top step represents a new age and when it sinks to the ground level, the gods will become like humans and the world as it is now will end. Each October one of the most spectacular festivals in Bhutan, the Jampa Lhakhang Drup is staged here. On one evening, after the Lama dances, the monastery is lit by a fire dance to bless infertile women. Visit the Kurjey Lhakhang: This temple is located above Jambay Lhakhang and consists of three temples. The one on the right was built in 1652 on the rock face where Guru meditated in the 8th century. The second temple is built on the site of a cave containing a rock with the imprint of Guru's body and is considered the most holy. The present Royal Queen Mother recently built the third temple. These three temples are surrounded by 108 chhorten wall symbolic of each joint of the human body. Walk to see Tamshing temple, which was founded in 1501 by Tertön Pema Lingpa, the re-incarnation of Guru Padmasambhava. The monastery has very interesting religious paintings like 11000 Buddhas and 21 Taras (female form of Bohhisatava). The temple was restored at the end of the 19th century. Drive to Mebartsho 'the flaming lake' in the Tang Valley. This is where Pema Lingpa found the treasures hidden by Guru Rinpoche and thus became a tertön, 'a discoverer or religious treasurer'. The Mebartsho is in fact, not a lake but a gorge through which the river rushes. It is a great pilgrimage site, visitors launch small lighted lamps on the water. Images of Pema Lingpa and his two sons have been carved on the rock.

Dinner and overnight in Bumthang.

## **URA DAY EXCURSION**

## **DAY 7**

Ura Village is believed to be the home of the earliest inhabitants of Bhutan. The village lies southeast of Jakar, which is a one and a half hour drive from Bumthang proper. The drive takes you through forests and the National Sheep breeding center. In route cross Shertang La (3590 m pass) with a magnificent view of Mt. Gangkar Puensum (7541m). Closely clustered houses are the characteristics of the villages in Ura, which is a unique feature in the country. Above Ura village a new temple was inaugurated in 1986 dedicated to Guru Rinpoche and contains paintings of the cycle of his teachings.

Drive back to Bumthang for the night.

## **BUMTHANG – PHOBJIKHA**

## **DAY 8**

Drive to Phobjikha using the same highway back. Phobjikha Valley is one of the most beautiful open valleys in the country. The valley was made a conservation area by the WWF as it is the breeding ground for the endangered black necked cranes which migrate to the valley from Tibet and Mongolia in early November and migrates back in early March. To protect these endangered species from electrocution, the valley has no electricity or telecommunication facilities. The people in this valley use solar energy and satellite communications. Visit to the Crane Observation and Education Centre, activities within the Centre are early morning crane observation and counting and crane study via the nature trails. The Royal Society established the centre for Protection of Nature (RSPN), the only NGO in the country.

Dinner and overnight at Phobjikha.

### **PHOBJIKHA – PARO**

### **DAY 9**

Drive back to Paro. On the way see Tachogang Temple or the “Temple of the Hill of Excellent Horse” which rises in austere surroundings on the left bank of the river, a few km before Chhuzom at the confluence of the Paro and Thimphu rivers. A Tibetan Saint had a vision of the excellent Horse Balaha – an emanation of Avalokiteshwara while he was meditating there. He decided thereupon to build a temple at this spot in addition to one of his famous iron bridges (later carried away by floods in 1969). The temple is believed to have been built in 1433. Continue your journey to Paro.

Dinner and overnight in Paro.

### **PARO SIGHTSEEING**

### **DAY 10**

Visit the Ta Dzong, considered one of the finest natural museums in South Asia; it is filled with antique thanka paintings, textiles, weapons and armor. Drive to see the Rinpung dzong, built in 1645 to defend the valley against Tibetan invaders. The Dzong is now used as an administration center and school for monks. Visit Kyichu temple; one of the 108 temples built in the 7th century by the Tibetan King Songsten Gampo. The story states that a giant demoness lay across the whole area of Tibet and the Himalayas, preventing the spread of Buddhism. To overcome her, King Songtsen Gampo decided to build 108 temples, which would be placed on all the points of her body. Of these 108 temples, 12 were built in accordance with precise plans. Thus, it happened that in 638 AD the temple of Jokhang in Lhasa was built over the very heart of the demoness.

Dinner and overnight in Paro.

### **PARO DAY EXCURSION**

### **DAY 11**

Hike or ride a pony to the famous Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) for an hour and a half uphill. The monastery is perched on a rocky ledge with a sheer drop of nearly 4,000 feet. It is said that in the second half of the 8th century, Guru Padma Sambhava, the saint who converted Bhutan to Buddhism, alighted here upon the back of a tigress. Here we enjoy snacks and tea at the cafeteria viewpoint. Take a short walk to the nearby ruins of the Drukgyal Dzong which was built in 1647 by the founder of Bhutan Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to commemorate his victory over Tibetan invaders, led by Mongolian warlord, Gushri Khan in 1644. Strategically built

over the only passage into Paro valley, the dzong helped to repel numerous invasions all through the course of Bhutanese history. It so impressed the early visitors in 1914 that the dzong was featured on the cover of *National Geographic*.

## **PARO – DEPARTURE**

## **DAY 12**

Early morning your guide will escort you to the airport for you to board your flight out of the Kingdom.

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