

7 Day Cultural Tour

(SAMPLE ITINERARY)

Paro - Thimphu

Day 1

Your introduction to our enchanting kingdom begins with a flight over the Himalayas into Paro Valley; truly one of the world's most spectacular sights. You will view the world's highest, most majestic peaks and enjoy the view of the approaching valley with its primeval alpine forests, monasteries, temples and farmhouses nestled in splendid mountain isolation. After clearing customs and immigration your Bhutanese escort will drive you through the lush green valley of Paro, with a stop for lunch. After lunch depart for Thimphu, a short 2 hour drive from one valley to the next, through paddy fields, apple orchards, farmhouses and paddy stacks. You will see farmers drying paddies on the road, numerous cattle, pine trees and hamlets that smell of burning woods. Thimphu, the capital city of the kingdom of Bhutan, has many charms, one of which is Bhutan's own version of the colonial traffic policemen who will fascinate you with their elaborate hand gestures. Check in at the hotel, and enjoy the evening at leisure.

Overnight at hotel in Thimphu.

Thimphu

Day 2

After breakfast the day begins with a visit to the National Memorial Chorten, built in honor of the late Majesty, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. The painting and images inside the monument provide a rare insight into Buddhist philosophy. Our day continues with visits to:

- Dupthop Lhakhang, one of the few surviving nunneries in Bhutan.
- The National Library, stocked with Ancient Buddhist manuscripts.
- The Art and Craft School where traditional art is still kept alive through instruction in the art of painting Thankas, sacred Buddhist religious scrolls.
- The Folk Heritage Museum, which is dedicated to connecting people to the Bhutanese rural past through the exhibition of items and artifacts used in rural households.
- The handmade Paper Factory, where papers are made from the fiber of Daphne and Edgeworthia.
- Tashichho Dzong, seat of the national government and the central Monastic Body, including the summer residence of the Je Khenpo, chief Abbot of Bhutan. The Tashichho Dzong is open to visitors in the winter when the Je Khenpo and the Monk Body move to Punakha, the ancient winter capital of Bhutan.
- Takin Preserve Centre where one can see the Takin, the national animal of Bhutan.
- Sangay Gang, Thimphu city view point.
- The Medicine Hospital and the Handicraft Emporium, which has all types of handicrafts for sale.

Overnight at hotel in Thimphu.

Thimphu – Punakha – Wangdue

Day 3

This Morning begins with a visit to the Weekend with its array of organically grown fruits, vegetables, chilies and produce from all over Bhutan. Drive about 3 hours to Punakha Valley with the road climbing through the forest of pine, cedar and

rhododendron, festooned with hanging lichen high up near Do Chula-La Pass at 3,050m with amazing Himalayan Mountain ranges, including Gangkhar Phuensum, the highest unclimbed peak (over 24,000ft) in the world. A stop to view the impressive 108 Druk Wangyal Chortens built on the Pass is sure to amaze. Our descent along a series of hairpin bends to the fertile Punakha Valley through temperate forest of rhododendrons and magnolias, to the semi-tropical zone rife with oranges, bananas and cactus. After lunch, visit Punakha Dzong built in 1636, the winter seat of Je Khenpo and ancient capital of Bhutan, remarkably located between the rivers of the Mo Chu (female river) and Pho Chu (male river). Then enjoy a short hike through the paddy fields and village to the Chime Lhakhang Temple built by Drukpa Kuenley, the "Divine Mad Man", dedicated to fertility. This is an important pilgrimage site for infertile women who wish to have children.

Overnight at hotel.

Wangdue – Thimphu

Day 4

Morning drive to the windy valley of Wangdue Phodrang to visit the strategically located Dzong on the spur of a hill above the river. The Dzong houses the administrative offices of the districts. After lunch drive back to Thimphu, along the way visit Simtokha Dzong, the oldest Dzong in Bhutan; converted into a centre for traditional studies in 1961 for lay students who later were trained as teachers of the national language, Dzongkha. It has a community of small monks and is under a major renovation under the supervision of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Overnight at hotel in Thimphu.

Thimphu – Paro

Day 5

Morning drive to Paro for sightseeing with a visit to the Drukgyal Dzong built in 1647 by the great Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, father and unifier of medieval Bhutan. The Dzong was destroyed by accidental fire in the 1950s and is now left in ruins as an evocative reminder of the great victories it was built to commemorate. Explore the ramparts and on a clear day experience an unforgettable view of Mt. Jhomulhari (7314m). Next, enjoy a visit to Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the 108 temples built in the 7th century by first Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. In the afternoon visit Ta Dzong, built in the 17th century as a watch tower for the Paro Dzong. Ta Dzong was converted into the National Museum in 1968, and it boasts antique thankas, textiles, weapons and armor, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artifacts; it is considered to be one of the best natural history museums in Asia. Below the museum is the Rimping Dzong, centre of civil and religious authority in the valley. A short walk takes you to the base of the Dzong and across a traditional cantilevered, covered bridge. A short distance further is one of the innumerable archery grounds where we will hope to take in a match and enjoy the national sport of Bhutan, archery.

Overnight at hotel in Paro.

Paro

Day 6

After breakfast drive up north of the valley to Satsam Chorten for one hour hike to the viewpoint of the Takshang Monastery, Tiger's Nest. The trail climbs through beautiful rhododendron and pine forest, many of the trees festooned with Spanish

moss, and an occasional grove of fluttering prayer flags. Recess for a light refreshment at the tea house and then walk a short distance until you see clearly and seemingly within reach, the Takshang Monastery. Built in the 1600s, this incredible monastery clings to the edge of a sheer rock cliff that plunges 900m, into the valley below. Legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava, the tantric mystic who brought Buddhism to Bhutan, landed here on the back of a flying tigress. Lunch will be served at the tea house, followed by a walk back to the road, and then a drive to the hotel. In route, visit Kyichu Lhakhang, built in the 7th century by Tibetan King Songtsen Gembo. The rest of the day is at your leisure.

Overnight at hotel in Paro.

Paro

Day 7

Early breakfast served at the hotel before driving to the Paro Airport where your escort will bid you farewell.