

10 Day Cultural Trek with Gangtey Trek Included (Sample Itinerary)

Thimphu

Day 1

The flight into Paro on the national airline, Druk Air, is a magnificent introduction to the mystical beauty of our Kingdom. On a clear day, breathtaking views of the world's highest peaks give way to the fertile green valley of Paro. After you finish your immigration and custom formalities, our Representative will greet you at the arrival entrance. After lunch drive for an hour to Thimphu, the capital of the Kingdom. Thimphu is the only capital city in the world without traffic lights.

Overnight at hotel in Thimphu.

Thimphu

Day 2

The day begins with a visit to the National Memorial Chorten (Stupa) built in honor of the third king of Bhutan, His Late Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk known as the Father of Modern Bhutan. This large Tibetan-style whitewashed Chorten is decorated with richly carved annexes facing the cardinal directions, and features elaborate mandalas, statues and a shrine dedicated to our beloved monarch. There are numerous religious paintings and complex tantric statues housed inside reflecting both peaceful and wrathful aspects of Buddhist deities. Next visit the Institute of Traditional Medicine and Science where traditional medicines are made from medicinal herbs. There is a day care facility where doctors diagnose patients and prescribe medicines/treatments by reading the pulse of the hand of the patient. The Institute was established in 1978. Next visit the National Institute of Zorig Chusum commonly known as "the painting school". Students follow a comprehensive course of 4 – 6 months that begins with drawing and progresses through painting, woodcarving, embroidery and statue making. Then visit the National Library – established in 1967 to preserve many ancient Dzongkha and Tibetan texts. It also houses many holy books and statues of important and religious figures in the history of Buddhism and Bhutan.

In the afternoon visit the Dupthop Lhakhang one of the few surviving nunneries in Bhutan. Take a short drive uphill high above the town to enjoy a wonderful view of Thimphu Valley. After 5 pm in the evening visit the Tashichho Dzong, meaning the Fortress of Glorious Religion. The Dzong houses the Throne room of the King, various Government Ministries and the office of the Prime Minister seat of the National government. It is the summer residence of Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot) and the monk body. Finally visit the Government run Handicrafts Emporium shop, which has a variety of Bhutanese handicrafts for sale.

Overnight at hotel in Thimphu.

Punakha

Day 3

Today depart for the western valley of Punakha, a drive which will take less than 3 hours. Punakha was the capital of the Kingdom until 1955. Leaving Thimphu the road climbs steeply through a forest of pine and cedar, festooned with hanging lichen high up near Dochula Pass at 3,050m. The pass marked by a large array of prayer flags and an impressive collection of 108 chortens – the Druk Wangyal Chorten built in 2005. On clear days, the pass offers panoramic views of the Bhutan Himalayan mountain ranges. The pass is covered in lovely rhododendron forests during spring. Stop for tea and snacks at the cafeteria located near the pass and if the weather is clear you can view the breathtaking mountain range through a powerful binocular at the cafeteria. After stopping for tea and the view, descend along a series of hairpin bends to the fertile valley of Punakha. In Punakha you will visit the Punakha Dzong – originally christened Punthang Dechen Phodrang meaning Palace of Great Happiness. The Dzong, remarkably located between 2 rivers – the Pho Chu (male river) and the Mo Chu (female river) is the winter seat of the Je Khenpo and the monk body. It is a short hike to the Chimi Lhakhang built in 1499 in honor of the Devine Mad Man, Lama Drukpa Kunley, after the Lama subdued the demoness of the nearby Dochula Pass with his "magic thunderbolt of wisdom". A wooden effigy of the Lama's thunderbolt is preserved in the Lhakhang and

childless women go to the temple to receive a wang (blessing) from the saint. Many childless women have received their blessings.

Overnight at hotel in Punakha.

Phobjikha

Day 4

After breakfast drive to Phobjika Valley, about an 80km drive (3.5 hours). On the way visit the Wangduephodrang Dzong, strategically located on a ridge at 4,430 ft, overlooking the old trade routes that ran east-west and north-south. Phobjikha Valley is one of the most beautiful open valleys in the country, and has been made a conservation spot 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 migrate 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 for and satellite communications. Visit the Crane Observation and Education Centre, and enjoy activities such as early morning crane observation and counting/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 hotel in Phobjikha.

Gantey – Gogona (Start of Trek)

Day 5

The trail winds through meadows and fields, and then climbs through a mixed forest of juniper, bamboo, magnolia and rhododendron to the Tselela Pass (3,320m).

Overnight in camp.

Altitude: 3,000m
Distance: 14km
Time: 5 - 6 hours

Gogona – Khotokha

Day 6

A gentle climb leads to Shobjula Pass (3,390m). The descent leads to a wide valley, reminiscent of the big sky views of mountain.

Overnight in camp.

Distance: 16km
Time: 6 - 7 hours

Khotokha - Chuzomsa or Wangdue via Nizergang – Punakha (End of Trek)

Day 7

A short ascent brings us to the Tashila Pass (2,788m); the descent is dry. We walk down through an ever-changing landscape into the drainage of the Dhang Chu.

Overnight at the hotel in Punakha.

Paro

Day 8

After early breakfast, drive to Paro and visit the Ta Dzong, an ancient watchtower that houses the National Museum. Below the museum is the Paro Rimpung Dzong, the 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; archery is the national sport.

Dinner and overnight at hotel in Paro.

Paro, Excursion to Taktsang Monastery

Day 9

This is a very special day, with an excursion to view the spectacular Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery. After breakfast a short drive takes us to Satsam Chorten, from there it is a 2 hour horse ride to the viewpoint point of the monastery. The trail climbs through beautiful pine forest, many of the trees festooned with Spanish moss, and an occasional grove of fluttering prayer flags. We stop for a rest and light refreshments at the Taktsang Jakhang (cafeteria) and then walk a short distance until we see, clearly and seemingly within reach, Taktsang 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 tiger. It is 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 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*. Also visit the Kyichu Lhakhang, built in 7th century by the Tibetan Buddhist King Songtsen Gampo, who is responsible for the spread of Buddhism in the Himalayas. He built 108 temples in one day to subdue a demon that was obstructing the path of the spread of Buddhism. Legend has it that the demon was eventually subdued by pinning it on the joints and using the temple as nails. Of the 108 temples, 7 are in Bhutan and the rest in and around the Himalayas.

Overnight at hotel in Paro.

Depart

Day 10

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