

# 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:** 06 May 2024

**12 Trees Planted for each Booking**

Our Classic Tour of Bhutan is a tour to this fascinating country where you have time to visit Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Trongsa, Bumthang and Phobjikha Valley.

We have arranged for all of our fixed date departures to coincide with one of the main festivals (Tsechus) in Bhutan. Tsechus are annual religious Bhutanese festivals of Drukpa Buddhism held in each district or dzongkhag of Bhutan. Please download Trip Dossier for details of which tsechus are taking place for each departure.

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.

Throughout this itinerary you stay at mid level hotels classified as three star. 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.

You have the option to join one of our fixed date departures or to have a private tour tailored to dates that suit you.

## 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

Gyelsa Boutique Inn

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

## Gyelsa Boutique Inn

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

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Meri Puensum 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

Hotel Meri Puensum 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

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Drive to Phobjikha valley (5 hours)

Sightseeing in Phobjikha valley

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Dewachen Hotel & Spa

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

Phobjikha 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. Phobjikha 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 Phobjikha 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 PHOBJIKHA VALLEY**

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Sightseeing in Phobjikha valley

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Dewachen Hotel & Spa

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**

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Drive to Bumthang (7 hours)

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Swiss Guesthouse in 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 IN BUMTHANG**

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Sightseeing in Bumthang

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Swiss Guesthouse in Bumthang

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: DRIVE TO PUNAKHA**

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Drive to Punakha (9 hours)

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Meri Puensum Resort in Punakha

From Bumthang we drive over Yotong La and to Tongsa, from here the road climbs to Pele La and descends to Punakha where we spend the night.

[Depending on availability and time of year there is an option of flying from Bumthang to Paro, please get in touch with us for further information].

## **DAY 10: DRIVE TO PARO**

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Drive to Paro (3 hours)

Sightseeing in Paro

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Olathang in Paro

After breakfast there is a long climb to Dochu La where there is superb view of the Himalayas including Gangkar Punsum, from the pass the road descends to Thimphu. We continue our drive for a further hour to Paro.

## **DAY 11: SIGHTSEEING IN PARO**

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Sightseeing in Paro

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Olathang 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 12: FLY BACK HOME

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Fly home

Breakfast

Transfers to Paro airport for flights 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 OLATHANG IN PARO



Hotel Olathang is set amidst 28 acres of blue pine forest on a hill overlooking Paro valley. This hotel is in traditional Bhutanese style.

There are 28 rooms with attached bathrooms and the cottages have an outdoor deck with chairs. There is a restaurant and bar in the main building. Other facilities include a spa and a traditional hot stone bath.

This was the first hotel built for tourists in Bhutan. Established in 1974 for the guests invited to the coronation of the Fourth King of Bhutan.



## SWISS GUESTHOUSE IN BUMTHANG



Swiss Guesthouse is above Jakar with good views over the valley. This property is an old Bhutanese farmhouse surrounded by apple orchards. The older sister of the first King of Bhutan used to live here.

A Swiss-Bhutanese family set up the guesthouse. They also make cheese and this property is well known for its Swiss dishes such as Fondue and Raclette. There is a restaurant and a bar. They serve Red Panda beer, this is a traditional wheat beer brewed in Bumthang. The rooms are simple with attached bathrooms. They also have a wood-burning stove (bukhari) for heating.

## DEWACHEN HOTEL IN PHOBJIKHA VALLEY



Dewachen Hotel is located above Gangtey valley and a short walk from the area with black necked cranes. This property is designed in traditional Bhutanese style and is set in three acres of garden and apple orchard with views over the valley.

There are 16 rooms with attached bathroom and individual balconies. Each of the rooms has a wood-burning stove (bukhari) for heating. There is a restaurant and a bar.

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## HOTEL MERI PUENSUM IN PUNAKHA



Hotel Meri Puensum is above Punakha with good views down to the river and valley below. This property is family owned and was one of the first hotels built in Punakha.

The rooms have attached bathrooms and are simple yet functional. Some of the rooms have balconies overlooking the valley. There is a restaurant serving Bhutanese, Indian and Chinese dishes. Most meals are a buffet style. The blocks of the hotel are set in an attractive garden.

**GYELSA BOUTIQUE INN IN THIMPHU**

Gyelsa Boutique Inn is a family-run hotel located in the centre of Thimphu city. It is within walking distance of the restaurants, cafes and shops of the largest city in Bhutan.

The hotel has 6 suites and 12 twin rooms. The furniture is made in Bhutan from Himalayan wood. Facilities include a restaurant, bar and café. Every room has wifi.

**Notes downloaded on: 06-05-2024**

