



# LAYA GASA



**COUNTRIES VISITED:** BHUTAN

**TRIP TYPE:** Trekking

**TRIP GRADE:** Strenuous

**TRIP STYLE:** Camping

**5 Based On 3 Reviews**

**KG Carbon Footprint**

**TRIP LEADER:** Local Leader

**GROUP SIZE:** 2 - 10 people

**NEXT DEPARTURE:** 10 Oct 2024

**17 Trees Planted for each Booking**

Laya Gasa or Half Snowman trek traverses a section of the Bhutan Himalaya. The trail follows the border with Tibet from Paro to Laya village crossing four high passes.

This Himalayan trek in Bhutan crosses four mountain passes over 4,000m. You travel through Bhutanese landscape from farmland, forests and into the alpine. You will see Dzongs located in strategic positions along the Tibet border.

While trekking there are mountain views of Bhutan's most impressive peaks. Mount Chomolhari and Mount Jitchu Drake tower over the first section of the trek. Laya Gasa is sometimes called the Half Snowman trek. This itinerary follows the same route until Laya village as the longer 28 day [Lunana Snowman](#) until Laya village. After trekking to Laya we descend to the hot springs at Gasa. We drive to the Punakha Valley and on the next day drive to Thimpu.

We have designed our Laya Gasa trek itinerary for time for essential acclimatisation. At the start of the trip we organise a visit to Haa valley for two nights to help you adjust to the high altitude. This is a camping style trekking expedition where you sleep in tents and our cooks provide the meals.

## REASONS TO CHOOSE US

- We are Himalayan trekking specialists having operated trips in Bhutan for many years. [Roland Hunter](#) has designed our itinerary from his first-hand experience of Half Snowman trek.
- Our Laya Gasa Half Snowman itinerary is the best for acclimatisation, safety and enjoyment. We include two nights in Haa Valley before the trek for essential acclimatisation.
- We have chosen the optimal times of year to complete this trek in Spring and Autumn seasons. By starting earlier or later there is a high chance that winter snows will block the passes.
- Our [AITO Traveller Reviews for Laya Gasa](#) and [AITO Traveller Reviews for Lunana Snowman](#) have a holiday rating of 100%. Based on client feedback we won the 2018 Gold Award as AITO Tour Operator of the Year. Read more about our [Testimonials and Awards](#).
- We use sturdy A frame tents for our camping treks in Bhutan. These are high quality tents with space for two people plus gear.
- We pay for private weather forecasts from EverestWeather.com. We also use in house forecasting throughout the duration of this trek.
- We send a Thuraya satellite phone on our group treks in Bhutan. Your leader will have reliable communications for logistics, planning and group safety.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All internal transport and transfers including airport collections in Paro.
- Twin share rooms at hotels while in Bhutan.
- All meals included while in Bhutan.
- Twin share tents while on trek.
- Trekking arrangements. Including permits and fees, tents, Bhutanese guides, pack animals and cooks.
- Weather forecasts from EverestWeather.com.
- Thuraya satellite phones for organising logistics and medical evacuations. It can also be also used for personal calls at extra cost.
- Rubberised luggage tag posted to you before departure
- Full financial protection. Our Air Travel Organiser's Licence (ATOL) number is 10921. Our Association of Bonded Travel Operators Trust (ABTOT) membership number is 5365).
- Pre departure support and advice from The Mountain Company. We are available by email, phone or face to face meetings.

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flight to/from Paro (flying from Bangkok, Singapore, Kathmandu and Delhi).
- Travel & trekking insurance.
- Personal clothing & equipment please see Appendix for suggested kit list.
- Tips.
- Other items not listed in "What is included".

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1: FLY TO PARO (2,280M)

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Arrive in Paro

Lunch and Dinner

Hotel Olathang in Paro

We will meet you on arrival at Paro airport and drive you to the hotel. When the whole group has arrived we will give a full briefing to get you ready for the Laya Gasa trek. Later on we will organise a trip into Paro to change money at the bank and to look around the town. Afterwards we arrange sightseeing tour to visit Paro Dzong and the National museum. Paro is Bhutan's second largest town. The valley also contains

significant religious and historic sites in the country. It also has as well as Bhutan's only international airport.

## **DAY 2: MORNING WALK TO TAKTSANG MONASTERY (3,120M), AFTERNOON DRIVE TO HAA VALLEY (2,712M) VIA CHELE LA (3,780M)**

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Walking 9km (4 hours)

Drive to Haa Valley (2 1/2 hours)

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Risum Resort in Haa Valley

After breakfast we organise a walk up to the Taktsang monastery known as the "Tiger's Nest". The hike up to the monastery through pine forest takes about 2 to 3 hours and the trail ascends 520m. This is a good opportunity to stretch your legs after your travels to Bhutan. After our visit to Taktsang we drive to the Chele La pass at an altitude of 3,780m. From here on a clear day there is a view of Mount Chomolhari to the north. We descend from the pass into Haa Valley at an altitude of 2,712m where we stay for two nights. Being at this high elevation before the trek is essential for acclimatisation. Haa Valley remains one of the least visited areas in the country.

## **DAY 3: DAY WALK AROUND HAA VALLEY (2,712M)**

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Day walk in Haa Valley

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Risum Resort in Haa Valley

Today we explore Haa valley and go for a walk. With past Snowman groups we walked through Lechuna village and down to the Haa Chhu (river). After crossing a wooden bridge we walked up through forest up to Jamte Gompa. After visiting this old monastery we descend to Chumpa bridge and to Chuma village.

## **DAY 4: DRIVE TO CHELE LA (3,780M) AND WALK ALONG THE RIDGE FOR ACCLIMATISATION THEN DRIVE TO PARO AND ONTO SHANA (2,790M)**

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Drive to Paro and onto Shana Camp

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Camping

We leave Haa valley and drive up to Chele La where we stop and walk along the ridge for extra acclimatisation. If we are lucky we will get the views again of Mount Chomolhari to the north. From the pass we drive down to Paro and then we continue past Drugyel Dzong. From here we drive further along a jeep track to Shana. At Shana we meet the trek crew and spend our first night in the tents before starting the trek tomorrow.

## **DAY 5: TREK TO SOI THANGTHANKA (3,510M)**

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Walking for 9km (6 to 7 hours)

Walking ascent 895m

Walking descent 175m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Camping

Today we start the Laya Gasa trek and have 10 days of walking ahead of us to look forward to. From Shana camp the trail passes through rhododendron and blue pine forests. It is often muddy on this section of the walk so it is a good idea to use trekking poles and to wear gaiters. Tonight we camp in a clearing in the forest at Soi Thangthanka.

## **DAY 6: TREK TO CHOMOLHARI BASE CAMP (4,080M)**

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Walking for 13km (5 hours)

Walking ascent 530m

Walking descent 65m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Camping

After an hour or so walking from camp we leave the forest as we climb above the tree line into a beautiful valley. We arrive at Chomolhari Base Camp, often known as Jangothang, at an elevation of 4,080m. Towering above there is a superb view of Mount Chomolhari at an altitude of 7,326m. Next to the camp are the ruins of an old Dzong that used to guard Bhutan against invasions from Tibet.

## **DAY 7: ACCLIMATISATION DAY AT CHOMOLHARI BASE CAMP (4,080M)**

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Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Camping

To help the acclimatisation process we spend two nights at Chomolhari Base Camp. It is a good idea to go for a walk in the morning up to higher altitude ("climb high, sleep low"). There are options including walking up a ridge to the north for good views of Mt Jichu Drake. The other scenic walk is to the twin lakes at Tsho Phu (4,350m). This is a holy lake where fishing, swimming or throwing stones is not permitted.

## **DAY 8: CROSS NYILE LA (4,890M) AND TREK TO LINGSHI (4,150M)**

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Walking for 13km (6 hours)

Walking ascent 835m

Walking descent 830m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Camping

Today we cross the first of the major passes on the Laya Gasa trek. It is a steady ascent on a good trail to Nyile La pass at an altitude of 4,890m. There are fine views of Mt Takaphu (6,526m) to the North and Tiger Mountain to the East. We descend from the pass on another good trail. Further down we enter a forest and then walk to our camp in a grassy area outside Lingshi village.

## **DAY 9: TREK TO CHEBISA (3,850M)**

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Walking for 10km (4 1/2 hours)

Walking ascent 360m

Walking descent 495m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Camping

After breakfast we walk past the Dzong damaged in the recent earthquake. On leaving Lingshi village the trail contours high above the valley. This area is well known for its medicinal plants and flowers. We pass a ridge covered with prayer flags and descend into a side valley near Goyok village. Another hour further we arrive at Chebisa village located in a valley with a waterfall at its head.

## **DAY 10: CROSS GOMBU LA (4,400M) AND TREK TO SHOMUTHANG (3,950M)**

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Walking for 14km (5 hours)

Walking ascent 670m

Walking descent 550m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Camping

After crossing the Gombu La at an altitude of 4,400m we descend through a hillside of rhododendrons. We camp for the night at Shomuthang.

## **DAY 11: CROSS JHARE LA (4,780M) AND TREK TO ROBULATHANG (4,410M)**

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Walking for 14km (5 hours)

Walking ascent 1,000m

Walking descent 800m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

## Camping

After an early start we climb towards the Jhare La at an altitude of 4,780m. From the summit of the pass there are good views of Tiger Mountain, Mt Jitchu Drake, Takaphu and Kang Bum. Descending from the pass we pass Tsharijathang where herds of Takin live at some times of the year. The taking is the national animal of Bhutan.

## **DAY 12: CROSS SHINGE LA (5,000M) AND TREK TO LIMITHANG (4,160M)**

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Walking for 12.5km (7 hours)

Walking ascent 900m

Walking descent 860m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

## Camping

There is a long climb taking around 4 hours to the Shinge La at an altitude of 5,000m. In 2011 monks built and consecrated a Buddhist chorten on the summit of Shinge La. There is another fine view of the Bhutan Himalaya including the Tiger Mountain at the head of the valley. On the descent we walk next to a terminal moraine and glacial lake located above Limithang camp.

## **DAY 13: TREK TO LAYA (3,700M)**

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Walking for 10.5km (4 1/2 hours)

Walking ascent 280m

Walking descent 560m

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

## Camping

Today we walk through forest along the river to Laya village. Layap women wear distinctive conical bamboo hats with turquoise and jade jewellery. We deliver food and fuel at Laya to support the next section of Snowman trek into Lunana. We have to plan the logistics as it is not possible buy supplies along the way.

## **DAY 14: TREK TO KOENA (3,240M), DRIVE TO PUNAKHA**

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Walking 12.5km (7 hours)

Drive to Punakha (3 hours)

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

## Camping

The trail descends from Laya to the army post at Taksaka. This is close to the trail junction for Lunana yet we continue along the path towards Punakha. The forest along Mo Chu is lush and you have to ascend



over many spurs as the trail descends this valley. There is a road to Koena so we finish the trek here and then drive down the valley to Punakha.

## **DAY 15: PUNAKHA SIGHTSEEING, AFTERNOON DRIVE TO THIMPHU**

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Sightseeing in Punakha

Drive to Thimphu (2 hours)

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Gyelsa Boutique Inn in Thimphu

After breakfast we visit Punakha Dzong. This is an impressive building and at the confluence of the Pho Chhu (father) and Mo Chhu (mother) rivers. This dzong is the second largest in Bhutan. Ngawang Namgyal, 1st Zhabdrung Rinpoche, built the dzong in 1638 so it is also the second oldest.

Afterwards we visit Chimi Lhakang also known as the fertility temple of Bhutan. Local families see the temple as a potent fertility shrine. It takes about 20 minutes to walk across rice fields to reach the temple. Lama Drukpa Kunley, known as the divine madman, forms the basis of legends about the monastery.

In the afternoon we leave for Thimphu by driving over the Dochu La pass at an altitude of 3,050m. This is one of the finest viewpoints of Eastern Himalaya. On a clear day you can see the peaks Masangang, Tsendagang, Terigang and Gangkar Punsum. On arrival to Dochu La you can get out of the car to admire the view. We walk around the 108 chortens marking the summit of the pass. We then drive through beautiful forest into the Thimphu Valley.

After checking into the hotel you have the afternoon to explore the town centre of Thimphu. There are a wide range of shops, restaurants and cafes.

## **DAY 16: THIMPHU SIGHTSEEING**

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Sightseeing in Thimphu

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Gyelsa Boutique Inn in Thimphu

Today we have a full day of sightseeing in Thimphu. There are many options of places to visit with your guide. We visit the Tashichho Dzong and the large Shakyamuni Buddha statue overlooking town. It is also worth taking time to explore the town centre. We can see the Clock Tower square and Changlimithang Stadium. There are lots of shops, restaurants and cafes.

## **DAY 17: FLY BACK HOME**

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Fly home

Breakfast

Transfers to Paro airport for flights back home. End of trip.

## DATES & PRICES

### 2024

Dates	Trip Leader	Price	Single Supplement: Room/Tent	Availability
10 Oct 2024 to 26 Oct 2024	Local Leader	US\$7,095pp	US\$350pp / US\$495pp	2 Left to Guarantee

### 2025

Dates	Trip Leader	Price	Single Supplement: Room/Tent	Availability
24 Apr 2025 to 10 May 2025	Local Leader	US\$7,095pp	US\$350pp / US\$495pp	2 Left to Guarantee
09 Oct 2025 to 25 Oct 2025	Local Leader	US\$7,095pp	US\$350pp / US\$495pp	2 Left to Guarantee

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

A Typical Day On Trek

### TYPICAL DAY ON CAMPING TREK IN BHUTAN

We provide a comfortable experience on our camping style treks in Bhutan. Our team works hard to support you so that you can relax and enjoy the trek. We provide personal tents, mess tent, kitchen tent and toilet tent(s). The camp will be set up and dismantled by the trek crew. We bring along a cook and kitchen helpers to provide the meals.

The day starts with an early morning mug of tea brought to your tent by one of the trek crew. Before heading for breakfast you pack your overnight gear into your duffel bag. During breakfast the trek crew pack away the tents. The pony men load up the pack animals and set off on the trail. After breakfast, between 7am and 8am, we start walking.

The pace of the trek is moderate as there is plenty of time in the itinerary to reach the camp for tonight. There will be plenty of time to enjoy the scenery, take photos and explore the local villages. Lunch will be around midday at a spot by the side of the trail. After lunch we continue the walk and on most days we arrive to camp by mid afternoon. Some of the trek crew would have gone ahead of the group to set up camp and to put up the tents. On arrival to camp you will get a hot drink and biscuits. In the evening our cook will provide a three course meal in the mess tent around 6pm.

After supper the leaders will discuss the plan for the next day. Afterwards people might stay in the mess tent chatting about the day's events or playing cards. After a tiring day most people head to their tent quite early for the night. Tomorrow is likely to be very similar as today! The only difference is that if we are crossing a high pass or climbing to a summit we leave camp earlier in the morning.

Food provided on Camping Trek

### FOOD PROVIDED ON CAMPING TREK IN BHUTAN

While on a camping style trek in Bhutan we provide tasty and nutritional food. We make sure there is more than enough quantity to go around as trekkers will be hungry after a long day on the trail. Over the years we have worked on increasing the variety of the menus. We have expanded the list of ingredients provided to the cooks so they have more to work with. Also in 2015 we purchased two food dehydrators with a vacuum sealing machine. We dehydrate a large number of different vegetables in Paro before



departure. This has transformed the quality of food especially on the longer treks to remote areas.

For breakfast we provide porridge or cereal, toast or chapatis and eggs. There will be hot drinks including tea, herbal teas, hot chocolate and coffee. We provide fresh coffee from our Bialetti Moka coffee machine.

For lunch we stop at a convenient spot with water at the side of the trail. In Bhutan the cooks prepare lunch after breakfast before leaving camp in the morning. One of the ponies carries the insulated "tiffin" containers to the lunch place. After lunch we have time to relax before starting to walk again in the afternoon.

On arrival at camp in the afternoon you have biscuits and a hot drink such as tea or coffee. Around 6pm we serve a three course meal in the mess tent. The starter is often soup with popcorn or poppadums. We have a range of main dishes and carbohydrates including rice, potatoes or pasta.

We cater for a variety of dietary requirements. Our meals are suitable for vegetarians. If there is a meat dish then we also provide vegetarian options as standard. During booking we find out if you have any dietary needs and agree upon meal plans before departure. If you have any questions about the food provided please get in touch with us to discuss further.

## Communications

### COMMUNICATIONS

We bring a Thuraya satellite phone for logistical, safety and personal use. Personal calls charged at £4 (US\$5 or €4.50) per minute and £2 (US\$3 €4.50) to send and receive SMS text.

## Kit List

### KIT LIST FOR LAYA GASA

This is the mandatory kit list for the safety of everyone in the group and to ensure a successful trek. You must have the following items tailored for Laya Gasa trek. The group leader will check your gear in Paro before departure for the trek.

As a reminder, the weather on this trek will vary season to season and day to day as you ascend to higher elevations. At the start of the Autumn trek you are likely to experience rainy and muddy conditions. You will experience the coldest temperatures at Robulathang at an altitude of 4,410m. Overnight lows here will be down to around -12 Celsius.

You should bring a rucksack or backpack for gear required during the day. Your pack should contain items such as warm clothes, jacket, camera, water bottles, personal first aid kit and snacks. **The weight limit is 5kg.** A pack animal will carry the rest of your personal equipment packed in a duffel or kit bag. **The weight limit for your duffel bag is 15kg.** Please mark your bag on the outside for easy identification.

It is not possible to buy trekking gear in Bhutan. You must arrive at the start of the trip with the right kit as per this list. Print the kit list and tick items off as you pack them then weigh your kit bag before you come on trek.

## Footwear

- Walking Boots. A pair of water repellent boots with ankle support. Boots must be in good condition, the best approach is to get new boots and break in before the trek. Over the years we have had several boots fall apart so you should also bring trail shoes as a backup.
- Trail shoes. Used around camp and as a replacement if your walking boots fall apart!
- Sandals. Enclosed sandals are best to protect your feet during river crossings. Required for river crossings as well as two trekking poles.
- Walking socks.

## Clothing

- Waterproof and Windproof jacket (with hood) and trousers (goretex or similar). For use if it rains or

snows during the trek and in windy conditions.

- Trekking trousers. (eg. Mountain Hardwear Mesa V2 or The North Face Paramount Peak).
- Soft Shell Trousers.
- Long sleeve tops or shirts (not cotton).
- Micro fleece.
- Mid to heavyweight fleece or synthetic/ primaloft top.
- Sleeveless/ gilet or body warmer type fleece / synthetic top. This will help keep your core warm while not bulking when layering up. Gilet used in combination with base layers, other fleeces and down jacket. This provides the most warmth and insulation.
- Thermals or base layer for top & bottom (merino wool or synthetic).
- Fleece or synthetic leggings. Worn around the camp or added as a layer when the temperatures start to drop higher up.
- Medium weight down jacket.

## Heads and Gloves

- Fleece gloves.
- Warm mittens and/or gloves.
- Wool or fleece hat.
- Sun hat.
- Bandana or scarf (eg. Buff Headwear).
- Headtorch. Bring extra batteries.
- Sunglasses. The lenses need to be Category 4 rated. They should have side protection or wraparound design.

## For crossing the passes

- Trekking poles (Black Diamond with "Flick Lock" are best). Two poles are mandatory for your safety. These will be helpful on steep sections of the trail and river crossings. Also for walking on snow or ice higher up.
- [Kahtoola Microspikes](#) or [YakTrax Summits](#). These are for your security when descending passes with snowy or icy conditions. They fit onto your walking boots.
- Gaiters. A pair of knee high gaiters used to keep boots dry if walking through snow or on wet ground.

## Personal equipment

- Sleeping bag. Overnight lows down to -12 Celsius.
- Fleece or silk liner for your sleeping bag. A liner protects your sleeping bag from getting dirty. Also helps by adding extra insulation to keep you warm at night.
- Sleeping mat (eg. Thermarest). We do NOT provide mats on our treks in Bhutan.
- Day pack. Recommended size is around 40 litres. You need to have enough space to carry water bottles, camera, snacks and extra clothing and climbing gear. The pack should have a good waist belt. It is also a good idea to bring a rain cover to keep the contents dry.
- Stuff sacks for keeping your gear dry and organised. Or even better are fold dry bags such as from Exped.
- Two water bottles (Nalgene wide mouth bottles are the best). You may use a hydration pack lower down but the tube will freeze in the cold so ensure you still have 2 water bottles.
- Pee bottle. Recommended as means you do not have to get up to find the toilet tent at night! For men you can use an old water bottle. For women take a look at [SheWee](#).
- Sunscreen and lipsalve with a high SPF.
- Water purification tablets (Pristine, Biox Aqua or Aqua Mira).
- Favourite snack food.
- Books and cards etc.
- Camera with spare batteries and memory cards.
- Insurance certificate.
- Earplugs (optional).
- Baby wipes (optional).
- Hand sanitizer. Keep this in your day pack for use after a toilet break during the trek or before eating any snacks. We provide sanitizer for use before meals.

## Travelling

- Duffel bag for your personal gear on the trek (carried by a pack animal). Rugged and waterproof made of a plastic material. Size 100-120 litres. Eg. Mountain Equipment 100l or Rab 120l. Bring a small combination padlock to secure the bag.
- Travel clothes. You will need casual clothing for air travel days and time spent before/ after the trek.
- Toiletry bag with soap, travel towel, toothbrush etc. We provide toilet paper while on trek.

### **Personal first aid kit**

We provide a [comprehensive group first aid kit](#). Please bring personal medications and other items you might use such as:

- Any personal medications.
- Blister treatment (Compeed patches are the best)
- Rehydration powder (eg Dioralyte).
- Analgesics (paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin).
- Plasters and zinc oxide tape.
- Throat lozenges.
- Diamox (helps with acclimatisation).

Threat and risk assessment

### **RISK ASSESSMENT FOR LAYA GASA**

You should be aware trekking in a developing country involves a risk of personal injury or death. You must accept these risks and be responsible for your own actions and involvement. Adventure travel requires an open and flexible attitude. You may experience extreme conditions and unpredictable weather. There could be last minute changes to the itinerary beyond our control. The ability to work in a team is an important aspect of our trips.

We have performed a threat and risk assessment for our Laya Gasa Half Snowman trek. Our trips have a degree of risk. This is part of the attraction of adventure travel and why so many people choose to join this type of holiday. By identifying the hazards we assess the level of risk. We have control measures in place to reduce this happening or to reduce the impact.

Our risk assessment is available to clients on request. We have listed below a summary of the significant risks and hazards identified by us:

- Falls and trips resulting in physical injury eg. slipping on ice or falling off the path.
- Altitude illness including but not limited to AMS, HACE and HAPE.
- Getting lost or becoming separated from the group.
- Severe bad weather and conditions when camping.
- Climatic injuries (dehydration, sunburn, heat exhaustion, hypothermia or heat stroke).
- Crossing a river with no bridge resulting in drowning and/ or a fall.
- Rock fall and landslides.
- Snow and ice avalanches.
- Lightning strike.
- Wildlife, pack animals (e.g. donkeys or horses) or stray dogs. Pack animals can knock people off the path. Dogs can attack and bite. Discuss rabies vaccination with your doctor.
- Earthquake.
- Risk of fire in the hotel or lodge.
- Endemic local diseases. Discuss vaccinations with your doctor before departure.
- Physiological injury. Such as heart attack, appendicitis, hernia, toothache etc. in a remote area.
- Road traffic accidents.
- Contaminated food and/ or water.

This trip visits a remote area. You are away from the usual emergency services and medical facilities. Evacuation for a serious injury requiring hospitalisation could take up to several days. This delay could impede your ensuing recovery. Helicopters are the usual means of evacuation. They are not always available or hindered by poor weather and flying conditions.

Weather and conditions

## **WEATHER AND CONDITIONS FOR LAYA GASA TREK**

The trekking season in Bhutan is late September through to May. October is generally recognised as having the best weather. Spring is a popular time of year with warmer weather than in Autumn. Also there is the advantage of seeing spring flowers and rhododendrons in bloom.

Laya Gasa trek will have a wide range of temperatures. This depends on the season, altitude and time of day depending on the altitude and the time of day. In the mountains between 2,000m and 3,500m the nights will be cool around 5 Celsius. During the day temperatures sometimes rise to 25 Celsius. At higher altitudes temperatures range from about 15°C to -12°C.

The time of year is important to increase the chances of completing the journey. The optimal time in Autumn season is to start towards the end of September or in early October. The monsoon should be winding down although the exact date varies year to year. In the Spring season we start in mid April and trek through until the end of the month. These are the optimal dates as the temperatures are warmer and winter snows melted off on the passes.

Suggested reading

## **SUGGESTED READING AND MAPS BHUTAN TREK**

### **Books**

Bhutan A Trekker's Guide: Bart Jordans, published by Cicerone

Beneath Blossom Rain: Discovering Bhutan on the Toughest Trek in the World. By Kevin Grange

Pocket Guide to the Birds of Bhutan: Grimmett R, Inskipp C & T.

Bhutan, An Illustrated Guide: Françoise Pommaret, Odyssey Guides

### **Maps**

Bhutan Himalaya. 1:390,000 by Nepal maps.

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.



## 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.

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## **CAMPING IN BHUTAN**



We use A frame tents in Bhutan. These sturdy tents work well with the conditions experienced in Bhutan. They are waterproof plus have ample headroom inside.

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## TRIP REVIEWS

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### REVIEW BY FHAMER ON 18/01/2019

Fantastic trek in Bhutan. I took the Laya Gasa trek in Bhutan for three weeks. It was the longest and highest trek I've ever taken. We had a group of 3 people, a crew of 6 and 9 horses. We also visited many dzongs and enjoyed other cultural activities. I felt immersed in Bhutanese Buddhist culture and village life. It was a great experience. The guide made sure we had lots of time to acclimate before hiking to the highest altitudes. This made it possible for me, a 72-year old female, to accomplish the trek — without any altitude sickness. We went up to 16,400 feet (5005 meters). The guide was fantastic, extremely encouraging, and the crew was great, too. I was impressed with the organization, friendliness, attention, and safety. It was a trip that tested the limits of my strength and an experience I'll never forget. Also gave me major bragging rights at home! ...

### REVIEW BY DAN 04/11/2019

Laya Gasa Trek, Bhutan. We were in Bhutan for 17 days, with excellent preparation for altitude acclimatization planned by The Mountain Company. We had no symptoms of AMS at all. We started out in local hotels and then switched to backcountry camping with support from our local guide: Tashi. He basically looked out for our wellbeing constantly throughout the trip. Tashi is an excellent guide, and also was very careful to ensure our safety. The food prepared by our cook Dorje was also excellent, and somehow he even managed to make us pizza twice! Ugen was our hard-working horseman who got our gear from site to site with some long days. The scenery and experiences were amazing and unforgettable. We had some long days and some difficult days, with our high point being 5005 m. This was my third trip to Bhutan for trekking. Clearly, I think Bhutan is a very special place to visit. The Mountain Company is run by Roland Hunter. He is a meticulous and very personable operator. He is very enthusiastic and met with us for over an hour in Kathmandu before and after our trip to Bhutan. This was my fourth trip with the Mountain Company. On two of these trips, Roland actually led the backcountry portion of the trip himself. As a result, I have come to know him as more than the "boss" of the company. I have no hesitation to highly recommend Roland and the Mountain Company. In fact, I have already signed up for another trip with him. ...

### REVIEW BY DG ON 27/11/2019

Laya Gasa trek in Bhutan. We had a 2 1/2 trip that began in Kathmandu, flying into Bhutan for trekking and cultural touring. Part of our time was in local hotels (these have improved over the years and are very comfortable now). We also had 10 days camping on the Laya Gasa trek. Roland has improved the acclimatization preparation for this trek, and the worst problems we had was a mild headache one morning probably related to what we did the night before. We were able to climb comfortably to 5000m. The food on trek was excellent (we even had pizza once!). Tasha was our local guide who is very knowledgeable, worked hard, and kept us safe. If you love the mountains, this is an amazing trek! Roland Hunter is a thorough, detailed organizer who loves the mountains, and wants his clients to have safe, enjoyable and memorable trips (and perhaps even come back again!). My trek this year was my fourth one with the Mountain Company, and I have been fortunate that Roland actually led two of my trips. In addition to continually improving the treks following feedback from his clients, he is also concerned with the wellbeing of the local people who work for him. On my trek this year, Roland met with us for over an hour in Kathmandu before and after our trek to exchange information and get feedback. In addition to working to help local projects, Roland took it upon himself to arrange for emergency delivery of supplies to some remote villages devastated after the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Roland and his team at the Mountain Company truly are excellent at what they do, and not only do I highly recommend them, but I am looking to go back again... ...

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

