



## **Bhutan**

### **Suggested Itinerary**

#### **Day 1 – Paro**

Depart on Druk Air, the only airline flying into Bhutan, for the spectacular flight into Paro. Stupendous views of Everest, Chomolhari or other magnificent peaks of the Himalayas are visible depending on visibility and route. Provided you obtain advance permission it is possible to fly in, in on one's own private jet. Your private car, driver and guide meet you at the airport, and take you to a luxurious hotel in the lovely Paro Valley.

After a lunch at the hotel, drive to the nearby National Museum of Bhutan for a private tour with the museum's director. You will also visit the Rimpung Dzong, a massive complex near the museum, home to several hundred monks and the seat of the local government.

#### **Day 2 – Bumthang**

Fly to Bumthang via helicopter (or drive if you prefer). The Bumthang region is the religious heartland of Bhutan, famed for its lovely temples, monasteries and forested hills. En route, there are impressive views of the Trongsa Dzong, Bhutan's largest fortress, formerly used to repel Tibetan invaders. In clear weather, there are also sweeping views of many Himalayan summits, including Gangkhar Puensum (24,836 feet), Bhutan's tallest and also the world's highest unclimbed peak.

Upon arrival at the Swan Temple of Ngalakhang, villagers performing a traditional Chipdrel ceremony greet you. Everyone in the village honours the arrival of guests by carrying butter candles, prayer flags, and incense, while dancing in a continuous procession en route to meeting the village headman, his wife, and other members of importance in the community. After a reception by the village elders, there will be a Marchang ceremony (offerings to local deities) and prayers made to the Guru statue inside of the Swan Temple.

Spend the afternoon with the villagers doing various daily activities such as pounding rice, threshing wheat, spinning and weaving. In the evening, enjoy a traditional hot-stone bath made from heated river stones, the traditional mode of bathing throughout Bhutan. After heating over a fire, hot stones are rolled into water and herb filled wooden tubs.

End the day with dinner at the home of the kind and hospitable village headman and his family, where they will expound on their lives, their culture and their faith.

#### **Day 3 – Bumthang**

The day begins with a group of singing women arriving in your camp after breakfast to invite you for a *tsechu*, a traditional Bhutanese religious festival featuring colourful costumes and dances performed by monks and trained artists (this depends on the timing of your visit).

The highlight of the day will be a traditional Bhutanese marriage ceremony (or wedding-vow renewal) with red-robed monks chanting, playing bells and six-foot trumpets, and serving exotic food and libations, such as yak-butter tea, rice-fermented *arra* liquor, to the guests in this lively yet highly spiritual event.

Stay one more night in the tented camp, and spend the evening singing, dancing and feasting with the warm and friendly people of Bumthang.



### **Day 4 – Gangtey**

In the morning, fly by helicopter (or drive) to picturesque Gangtey in the Phobjika Valley, where a large population of five-foot tall black-necked cranes from Tibet lives in the winter.

Wander through the quaint little town of Gangtey and visit the Goemba (monastery) undergoing a major renovation. Visit the private chambers of one of the senior monks, and have lunch or tea and snacks with him, while chatting with him about his life in the monastery.

Check into the intimate Amankora lodge with sweeping views over the breathtaking valley; the hotel has no electricity because of the harm it might do the crane habitat.

### **Day 5 – Punakha**

In the morning, fly by helicopter (or drive) to Punakha, agricultural breadbasket of Bhutan, and site of the impressive Punakha Dzong, a grand fortress once the capital of Bhutan until 1966.

After visiting the Dzong, hike to the nearby Chimi Lhakhang, a temple dedicated to the "Divine Madman", an eccentric monk from the 16th century. In the afternoon, visit a farmhouse and join the family for a cooking demonstration and tasting. Spend the night in the deluxe Amankora hotel in Punakha, where the main building is an old farmhouse, and dine with your fellow travelers at a large farmhouse table.

### **Day 6 – Thimphu**

After breakfast overlooking the terraced farms and rice paddies of Punakha, begin the gorgeous drive over the Dochu La Pass to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan.

In the afternoon, visit an orphanage or one of the programmes run by the Tarayana Foundation; an organization set up by Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan to alleviate poverty through training education.

In the evening, have cocktails and dinner at the home of a high-ranking government official or Member of Parliament. Stay at the Amankora lodge in Thimphu, the fourth in this hotel group which is known for its very high-end, but elegantly simple accommodations, and outstanding service and food.

### **Day 7 – Thimphu**

Participate in a wide variety of interesting activities that represent many diverse aspects of Bhutanese culture. In the evening, have dinner at the home of a prominent local family and engage in an informal discussion with local intellectuals about the King's concept of "Gross National Happiness".

### **Day 8 – Paro**

Spend the morning shopping at the markets for local handicrafts, textiles and Buddhist items. Drive to Paro, stopping en route to see the Kyichu Lhakhang, a 7th-century temple built by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo.

Take part in a Himalayan singing bowl meditation. The copper bowls produce vibrations that are harmonious with the body and listening to them with the proper practice produces restfulness and peace of mind.

Accommodations are again at the Amankora, Zhiwa Ling or Uma hotel. Relax in the evening with a Bhutanese hot-stone bath.

### **Day 9 – Paro**

Ride a horse or hike up to the awe-inspiring Takstang, or Tiger's Nest Monastery clinging to a granite cliff thousands of feet above the valley floor, and have a private

blessing with the top lama. Celebrate your last night in Bhutan with a multi-course traditional dinner accompanied by Bhutanese singing and dancing.

**Day 10**

Fly home, via Bangkok, Dhaka, Calcutta or Kathmandu.

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