

# TRAVERSE JOURNEYS

People Planet Purpose

## WONDERS OF BHUTAN

### Thimphu & Paro – 5 day/4 nights



*Unravel the wonders for yourself of this last Shangri-La, a land of snow-capped mountains, emerald green landscape, sturdy fortresses and gentle people. In Bhutan, tradition is real: The visitors can both see it and feel it. In a world where a thick cloak of globalization has all but smothered distinctive heritages, this self-reliant kingdom proudly stands alone. This trip will help you to experience and understand the authentic Bhutanese way of life while also immersing yourself in nature on several hikes.. Drive from one valley town to another visiting temples, monasteries, dzongs, isolated villages, and the people. This trip is a wonderful immersion into Bhutanese culture where daily life is itself a form of art.*

#### **Includes:**

- 3 or 4 star hotels & mountain lodge + all meals
- Private guide & driver
- Explore Thimphu's markets, Buddha point and Trashichhoedzong fortress
- Paro Valley explorations including the Punakha Dzong
- Temple hikes and excursions
- Sunrise hike to the Tigers Nest with picnic lunch
- Farmhouse visit + optional traditional hot stone bath
- Taxes + entrance fees + Bhutan visa
- Assistance with airfare from Delhi or Kathmandu

#### **Excludes:**

- International airfare
- Required travel insurance
- Beverages (alcoholic / non – alcoholic)
- Guide tips
- Temple donations

## **DAY 01 : Arrival from Kathmandu or Delhi**

*(55km, approx. 1.1/2 hour drive)*

The flight to Paro is one of the most spectacular in the entire Himalayas. Stepping out of the aircraft, the first impressions of Bhutan are the cool fresh air and deep blue skies.

On arrival we'll take about an hour's drive to Thimphu, the capital town of Bhutan, which leads through the Paro valley to the confluence of Paro and Thimphu rivers at Chuzom. On the way you'll see the **Tamchog Lhakhang**, the temple built by Thangtong Gyalpo, a pioneering engineer who introduced the construction of suspension bridges into Bhutan and Tibet (several of which are still in use today). The present bridge to Tachog Lhakhang was restored in 2005 in the design of a traditional style with iron chains.

We'll enjoy a traditional Bhutanese lunch in a heritage farmhouse. You'll get to experience typical flavors such as chili and green onion along red rice and many seasonal dishes.

In the afternoon, we'll check in to the hotel and you'll have free time to rest up or walk around Thimphu. Dinner will be at the hotel in the evening.



## **DAY 02 : Explore Thimphu Sites then to Punakha (75 km, approx. 3 hour drive)**

This morning we'll take some time to explore Thimphu's markets! Popularly known as the **Weekend Market**, this bustling, colorful market is the biggest one where farmers from different parts of the country gather to sell their farm products. You'll get to see all the grains, such as red rice, dried chiles and spices and all the many vegetables, from wild greens and mushrooms. You might even try some market specialties such as yak cheese!

After stopping for momos for lunch, we'll visit **Tashichhodzong**, 'fortress of the glorious religion.' This is the center of government and religion, site of monarch's throne room and seat of Je Khenpo or Chief Abbot. Built in 1641 by the political and religious unifier of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it was reconstructed in the 1960s in traditional Bhutanese manner, without nails or architectural plans.

We'll then drive north of town to the **Buddha Dordenma**, located atop a hill in Kuenselphodrang Nature Park. The statue fulfils an ancient prophecy dating back to the 8th century A.D that was discovered by Terton Pema Lingpa (Religious Treasure Discoverer) and is said to emanate an aura of peace and happiness to the entire world. This massive statue of Shakyamuni is made of bronze and is gilded in gold, measuring 51.5 meters in height, making it one of the largest statues in Bhutan. 125,000 smaller Buddha statues have been placed within the Buddha Dordenma statue, and each of these also have been cast in bronze and gilded.

We'll then drive to Punakha about three hours across the **Dochu-la pass (3,088m/ 10,130 ft)** stopping briefly at the top to take in the view and admire the chorten, main wall, and prayer flags which decorate the highest point on the road. 108 chortens or stupas known as Druk Wangyal Chortens have been built by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk, the eldest Queen Mother. These chortens are built in three layers, the first lowest level layer has forty-five chortens, the second has thirty-six and the top layer has twenty-seven, built around the main chorten. If the skies are clear, the following peaks can be seen from this pass (left to right): Masagang (7,158m), Tsendagang (6,960m), Terigang (7,060m), Jejegangphugang (7,158 m), Kangphugang (7,170 m), Zongphugang (7, 060 m), a Table Mountain that dominates the isolated region of Lunana - finally Gangkar puensum, the highest peak in Bhutan at 7,570m.

In the evening we'll stay at a beautiful mountain lodge with views of the **Punakha Dzong** below.

### **Day 03: Punakha Hike and on to Paro (125 km, approx. 4-hour drive)**

We'll start off the morning with a short hike (about 45 minutes) to the **Khamsam Yully Namgayal Chorten**, built by the Queen of Bhutan in 2004. This site overlooks the Punakha Valley is said to ward off evil deities. We'll then visit the **Punakha Dzong** or 'Palace of Great Happiness', built at the junction of the Phochu and Mochu rivers in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. This majestic dzong served as both the religious and the administrative centre of Bhutan in the past. It measures some 600 by 240 feet and has a six-story, gold-domed tower. Inside are courtyards and religious statuary that hint at the depth of history and spiritual tradition embodied here.

After lunch we'll take a short excursion through the village to the **Chimi Lhakhang**, also known as the temple of fertility. It is widely believed that couples who do not have children and want one, if they pray at this temple, they are usually blessed with a child very soon. The trail leads across rice fields to the tiny settlement of Pana, meaning 'field.' Along the way you'll also see many symbols of fertility and for those of you into health food, you'll see shops dedicated to wild harvested cordyceps, a fungus that grows on a caterpillar and is known for its health benefits.

We'll then drive back to Paro, about three hours along a scenic highway that encapsulates within itself a rich culture, scenic beauty and hundreds of myths and legends. It is home to many of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries as well as the National Museum and country's only international airport. Mount. Chomolhari (7,314m) reigns in white glory at the northern end of the valley and its glacial water plunges through deep gorges to form Pa Chhu (Paro River). Paro is also one of the most fertile valleys in the Kingdom producing a bulk of the locally famous red rice from its terraced fields.

#### **DAY 04: Sunrise Tiger's Nest Hike & Farmhouse Farewell + Optional Hot Stone Bath**

We'll get an early start for a sunrise hike to the **Taktshang Monastery or Tiger's Nest**. It is one of the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. Legends say that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery and hence it is called 'Tiger's Nest.' This site has been recognized as a most sacred place and visited by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646 and now visited by all Bhutanese at least once in their lifetime. It can only be reached by foot; there are no roads to the top. We'll visit the temple at the top pulling together many of the themes we've learned throughout the trip.



After our we come down, we'll enjoy a picnic lunch at the base before heading back for free time in the afternoon. You can head into Paro for some shopping and mementos or rest up after our hike. Then don your swimsuit if you're doing the hot stone bath, a traditional Bhutanese method of resting tired muscles in stone-heated, herb scented private baths. We'll follow this with our farmhouse farewell dinner.

#### **DAY 05: Depart Bhutan**

After an early breakfast at the hotel, you'll depart from Paro to either Kathmandu or Delhi.

## Pricing

Bhutan recently had a major revamp in its tourism policy. The Governmental Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) which was earlier called 'Royalty' has been hiked from USD \$65 to USD \$200 per person per night. Also entrance fees to monuments are significantly increased. Both these changes went into effect June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

So while an investment into visiting Bhutan may not be cheap, it is certainly a once-in-a-lifetime experience and supports the livelihoods of those that you'll be visiting in this unique country. The prices will vary depending on how many people book the excursion. Your Traverse trip leader will be in close contact with you about the final price based on bookings, which will be finalized no later than 60 days prior to trip departure. Airfare from Delhi (India trip) or Kathmandu (Nepal trip) will be booked for you and the price billed back to you based on current airfare pricing plus a 10% service charge.

Due to the nature of this unique excursion, a \$500 deposit is required on booking, followed by 50% of the balance after 30 days. The final balance will be due 60 days prior to departure.

Package cost per person in USD:

	<b>1 person</b>	<b>2-4 people</b>	<b>5+ people</b>
<b>Package Cost</b>	\$1395	\$995	\$895
<b>Bhutan SDF fees (\$200 x4 nights)</b>	\$800	\$800	\$800
<b>Bhutan visa fee</b>	\$40	\$40	\$40
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$2235</b>	<b>\$1835</b>	<b>\$1735</b>

Economy airfare per person in USD (estimate as of 2/2023):

	<b>Kathmandu Roundtrip</b>	<b>Delhi Roundtrip</b>
<b>Base Fare</b>	\$406	\$609
<b>Taxes</b>	\$161	\$140
<b>Service Charge</b>	\$57	\$75
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$624</b>	<b>\$749</b>

Payment Plan

On booking	\$500 deposit, subject to our normal payment & cancellation policy
30 days after	50% of balance due
60 days prior	Final balance due