



The Bhutanese Odyssey

WITH

PANORAMIC JOURNEYS

BHUTAN

The land of the Thunder Dragon is an extraordinary place. Vast and impressive fortresses, known as Dzongs, dominate Bhutan's landscape - from the wide subtropical valleys in the south to the Himalayan mountain ranges of the north. One of the world's biodiversity hotspots, Bhutan's national animal is the Takin - legend says it is half goat, half cow. This is a country where selling cigarettes or plastic bags is illegal, where giant protective penises are painted on the walls, where chillies and cheese with red rice is the national dish, and where Gross National Happiness is deemed more important than Gross National Product.

Tucked away from the modern world for centuries, Bhutan, the last remaining Himalayan Kingdom, is managing to retain its Buddhist culture and traditions of the past whilst taking a cautious approach to modernisation. The juxtaposition of old and new is one of Bhutan's most appealing qualities: its ancient history is one of legends and miracles performed by saints, whom the majority of the population still worship daily, whilst most of the population now have electricity produced by hydro power and 2008 saw a new King crowned and the election of a new democratic parliament - Bhutan really is an extraordinary country in transit.

PANORAMIC JOURNEYS BHUTAN

As our name suggests, we like big panoramic vistas and encounters that give one a new perspective on life - Bhutan boasts a few of these of Himalayan proportions. We have made a name designing journeys that allow our clients to get "under the surface" of a country - to meet the people and get off the tourist route. In designing this itinerary, we have allowed time to meet local people, to walk in rural valleys, and really get to know this beautiful country, as well as taking in the most important historical and religious sights that define Bhutan.



THE BHUTANESE ODYSSEY



This comprehensive journey crosses the whole length of the country, climbing over misty mountains and dropping down into tropical valleys. Visits to village homes, craft workshops, archery grounds and two remote local festivals in eastern Bhutan allow you to become fully immersed in Bhutan's rich culture. This trip really is one in a lifetime.

MAP OF BHUTAN



DAY	ITINERARY	ACCOMMODATION	TRAVEL DETAILS
1	<p>Arrive Kathmandu</p> <p>You will be met by a Panoramic Journeys representative who will be waiting to greet you with a board with your name on. The smells, noises and colours of this fascinating city will be on display during the journey to your hotel where you will have the rest of the day to relax after your flight. Early evening walk down to Thamel House Restaurant with your guide.</p>	Kantipur Temple House, deluxe room	Airport to Hotel – 40 mins
2	<p>To Paro</p> <p>Our airport representative will let you know what time to meet in the morning for your transfer to the airport. The flight to Paro is a visual treat – seats are allocated at check in, so get there early and try to sit on the left hand side for the best views. The highest Himalayan peaks rise above the clouds including Cho Oyu (8201m), Makalu (8462m), Everest (8848m), Lhotse (8506m) and the imposing block of Kangchenjunga (8586m). In Paro, you will be met by your guide and driver and taken along willow lined roads to this evening's hotel. Here you will have time to refresh before heading down to Paro Dzong and it's iconic wooden bridge.</p>	Gangtey Palace, Paro	Flight 1.5 hours
3	<p>Explore Paro Valley</p> <p>Today you will have time to explore Paro valley. Visit the magical Kyichu Lhakang, the unique cone shaped Dingtse Lhakhang (take a torch) and the atmospheric ruins of Drugyal Dzong. You may also have time to visit Dzongdrakha, a tranquil village of about eight farmhouses built around four temples in the cliffs. It is about an hours walk. Tonight, dine in a local farmhouse.</p>	Gangtey Palace, Paro	

Chele Laa Pass and hike

- 4 Today you will feel as you are really in the mountains as you head up the Chele La pass, with it's wealth of flora and fauna. Make sure you have a warm jumper up here - and plenty of sunscreen as it can get cold but the sun can be fierce. From here there is a 4 hour ridge hike to Kila Goempa. It's a tough but rewarding walk. If everyone would prefer a shorter walk, there is a trail down to the nunnery, that takes about an hour, or you can drive down. From Kila Goempa, it is about 20 minutes back to the road where you will meet your vehicle. This afternoon visit Paro's National museum and perhaps ask your guide to book a well earned hotstone bath for you this evening.
- Gangtey Palace,
Paro
- Paro to Chele
Laa 1hr

Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Lhakang hike

- 5 This morning you head to Taktsang Lhakhang, Bhutan's most iconic landmark and one of the most sacred of pilgrimages in the Himalayas. The hike is quite tough - but most abilities will be able to cope with it if it is taken at a steady pace and we allow the full day for the excursion and stop regularly including for coffee on the way up and for lunch on the return leg. There is a stopping point with a small cafe half way up and a second view point further up for those who suffer from vertigo, or would rather not walk the whole way. Walking through oak, rhododendrons and pine trees draped in lichen, it is a rewarding and photogenic hike. There are ponies available for hire for the first section. Please ask your guide if you would like one as you have not had many days to acclimatise.
- Gangtey Palace,
Paro

Thimphu

- 6 This morning you will be taken along the national 'highway' to the small capital of Thimphu stopping off at Thamchhu Lhakhang on the way. The view over Thimphu from the big Buddha statue helps to get your bearings before heading into Thimphu town. Later this afternoon head up to Mothitang to see Bhutan's national animal, the rare and elusive Takin. The viewpoint above Thimphu gives you an idea of the size of the city and if there is time, for those who wish to stretch their legs, there are great views of the town and Dzong on a lateral hike through the forests (1hr- 1.5hr) to Wanguetse and Dechenphodrang monasteries. This evening, dine at one of Thimphu's international restaurants.
- Druk Hotel,
Thimphu
- Paro to
Thimphu,
1.5hrs

Thimphu

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After breakfast, a full day of sightseeing in Thimphu. Today you will visit the Memorial Chorten, which is so important to Thimphu's inhabitants; the Folk Heritage Museum which will give you an insight into how many rural Bhutanese live; the Traditional Arts School and the Paper Factory as well as the local market. If there is time, and depending on guests interests you can also visit the National Textile Museum or the Traditional Medicine school.

Alternatively the day at leisure to explore Thimphu on your own.

Druk Hotel,
Thimphu

To Punakha via Dochu Laa

8

An earlier start this morning to ascend up to the colourful Dochu Laa pass. Hopefully you will have clear views of the high Himalaya. Visit the ornate Druk Wangyal Lhakhang (temple) atop of the hill before you start your descent into Punakha. You may like to walk some of this on foot, following the ancient woodland path, once the main road over the pass, to meet the vehicles further down. This temperate forest changes in character as you descend into Punakha to your hotel, where you stay for the next 2 nights. This afternoon visit Chimi Lhakhang - a fertility temple on top of a small hill.

Meripuensum
Resort, Punakha

Thimphu to
Punakha;
80km, 3
hours

Punakha Dzong and Chorten Walk

9

This morning drive up to the other side of Punakha valley to visit the Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal chorten. It's a 45 minute hike up to the chorten over a suspension bridge. Afterwards, either on foot, by vehicle or even by raft - head back down into the valley for a picnic lunch and to visit the spectacular Punakha Dzong - arguably the most beautiful Dzong in Bhutan, where you will take time to explore some of the magnificent temples. There may be an option to raft down to the Dzong (ask us).

Meripuensum
Resort, Punakha

Phobjikha

10	<p>Today we head to the beautiful Phobjikha valley - it's a bit of a bumpy drive, and there may be roadworks, but there will be stops along the way. Continue on the road east over the Black Mountains, where you may spot monkeys if you are lucky! A branch in the road leads to the glacial Phobjikha valley. You may like to take a walk down into the valley from the Lawa La pass, where you may come across herders with their Yaks. It will be cold here, so you might need to get out your thermals tonight!</p>	Dewachen Phobjikha	Punakha to Phobjikha; 81km; 3 hours
11	<p>Valley walk and Black-necked Crane centre Discover this wide open valley and try to spot the rare Black-necked Crane that winter here.</p>	Dewachen Phobjikha	
12	<p>Trongsa Dzong and museum This morning you may wish to start your day early - walking up through the valley, perhaps even up to the Lawa Laa pass - before getting in the car. Head, across the Black Mountains to the Pele Laa pass (3,300m) where you may see yaks grazing. Stop to stretch your legs at Chendebji Chorten. After a while you will see Trongsa Dzong in it's commanding position, perched on the other side of the valley. It is a 40 minute drive or a 2 hour walk (down and up) to reach - so you may wish to take a break and some photos from this side of the valley. Explore the Dzong and small town before heading to your hotel perched high above Trongsa.</p>	Yankhill Resort	Phobjikha to Trongsa; 85km; 3 hours
13	<p>Tang Valley via the Burning Lake This morning, head east over the Yotong La pass and into the Bumthang valleys. After a gradual decent along some of the straightest roads you will drive on in Bhutan, you will reach the small town of Jakar (sometimes called Chamkar), near the bottom of the Chokhor valley. Continue past here to drive up to Tang valley, the most remote valley in Bumthang. On the way, stop at the burning 'lake' and see if you can spot the temple that is said to be hidden in the water. Tonight you will be hosted by a local family in their farmhouse or stay in a more basic guesthouse in the old palace grounds.</p>	Homestay or basic guesthouse	Trongsa to Tang Valley; 94km; 3.5 hours

14	Back to Jakar Valley After a leisurely morning visiting Ogyen Chholing Palace museum head back South to Jakar. Spend the next two days walking between some of Bhutan's most important and most sacred temples in the Chokhor valley.	Swiss Guest House	Tang Valley to Jakar!; 30km; 1.5 hours
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15	Highlights of Bumthang Continue your exploration of Bumthang by vehicle and on foot. You are more than likely to be joined by cheeky school children and a 1 mile walk may end up taking an hour with all their questioning and the photo opportunities! This evening visit the Swiss Guest house for supper, although the service here can be slow, we love their home-made bread and banana cake! The 'factory shop' in the 'industrial area' sells swiss cheese, apple wine and locally brewed beer.	Swiss Guest House	
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16	Drive to Mongar Today's drive is long, but one of the most spectacular in Bhutan as you drive to Mongar. Stop to walk through the traditional village of Ura, and maybe visit the bar by the side of the road, where the owner is a traditional herbalist and has jars of cordiceps (the caterpillar fungus) and follow the road east over the Thrumshing La pass (3,750m) into eastern Bhutan. Stop in Sengor valley for a break and to stretch your legs. If time permits walk to the temple in Sengor village and perhaps visit a farm house there. From Sengor you begin the steep descent along roads that seem to cling to almost vertical cliffs! From the clouds you emerge into a completely different landscape of rice terraces, tropical fruits and monkeys playing on stones. Take a walk along the traditional main street before settling into your hotel.	Wangchuk Hotel, Mongar	Bhumthang to Mongar; 170km; 6-7 hours
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Mongar Festival; to Trashigang

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After a hearty breakfast, make your way to Mongar Dzong and take a seat around the beautifully paved courtyard. High ranking lamas and an orchestra are seated in a pavilion on one side of the courtyard. On the other, terraces accommodate hundreds of locals, their colourful ghos and kiras making a dazzling patchwork quilt in the bright sunshine. Many of these pilgrims have travelled a long way to watch the ceremonies and earn merit for the next life. Sitting amongst the local congregation you can witness the kaleidoscope of moving colour from above, and also look out across the valley. This afternoon head to Trashigang- travel up through leafy forests to the Kori La Pass (2,450m) and then descend bend after bend then past fields of banana trees until you reach the painted bridge over the Sheri chu at 700m altitude, soon you will start to see glimpses of Trashigang Dzong high above the bank of the river.

Lingkhar Lodge,
Trashigang

Mongar to
Trashigang;
65km; 2.5
hours

Trashigang Festival

18

Head straight to the Dzong for today's festivities. The Trashigang festival is an entirely different experience to that of Mongar. The Dzong is perched on a cliff and so the ceremonies take place in an enclosed courtyard. The pilgrims gather around the edge and monks look out from balconies on the first and second floors. The view from these balconies is magnificent. As the monks perform their dances their swirling robes appear as spinning tops on the stone paved floor. Trashigang town is an interesting place to walk around and buy any souvenirs for back home.

Lingkhar Lodge,
Trashigang

Trashigang Festival and explore area

19

Rejoin the festival goes to continue the celebrations. Perhaps also take a break to visit the picturesque Gom Kora (1hr drive), and the surrounding countryside. If it is a nice day, perhaps a picnic down by the river. Perhaps visit a local village where you will find weavers - famous in this area - although it is likely they will all be at the festival!

Lingkhar Lodge,
Trashigang

Drive to Samdrup Jongkhar

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An early start to head south to the border town of Samdrup Jongkhar. Today's drive will be your longest drive, but we will stop for breaks often including lunch on the way and a visit to the Khaling Handloom weaving centre if it is open. You will notice the landscape and climate changing as you head further south. Samdrup Jongkhar itself has an eclectic mixture of Bhutanese and Indian shops, restaurants and hotels, and worth a stroll around if there is time before settling into your hotel.

Hotel Mountain

Trashigang to
Samdrup
Jongkhar

To Guwahati and Delhi

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Up early and across the border into another world! Assam feels frenetic after the calm of Bhutan. You will drive to Guwahati for your flight to Delhi, stopping for lunch along the way. On arrival in Delhi you will be met by a PJ representative and transferred to your hotel.

Radisson Blu, Delhi

Samdrup
Jongkar to
Guwahati;
110km; 3
hrs. Flight to
Delhi

Depart Delhi

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Transfer to the airport for your flight home. If you would like to arrange any extensions or sightseeing in Delhi or anywhere else in India please ask.

Bhutanese Odyssey

HOW TO BOOK

1. GET IN TOUCH

This itinerary is just a suggestion, a starting point, something to build upon. Everyone of our itineraries is unique to you – we can add or lose days, tweak the activities, change the accommodation or hire a private jet until it's perfect for you. So, let's have a chat. Call one of our experts to discuss creating your private journey to Bhutan.

2. BOOK YOUR HOLIDAY

Once we've crafted the perfect journey for you we can sign you ready to go. We accept bank transfers, Visa, Mastercard or American Express, and UK cheques. Full payment methods are detailed in our booking conditions. We shall then send you a booking confirmation together with an invoice for the full payment of your holiday which is due 90 days before your departure date.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Call one of our experts on +44 (0)1608 676821 or email us at info@panoramicjourneys.com.

Some quick travel facts can be found in the Essentials section on the Bhutan page of our website

<https://www.panoramicjourneys.com/Destinations/Bhutan>. We will also send you a comprehensive Bhutan Practicalities document once you have booked.

