



# *Savouring Bhutan*

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 IN 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.



# Savouring Bhutan



Savouring... taking time, exploring slowly, chance encounters. Designed at a more relaxed pace with time to savour the country. Focusing on the valleys of Western Bhutan, time can be spent exploring these stunning areas on foot, meeting people and learning about Bhutanese culture. Head off on a serious hike, or just settle in a spot, enjoy the seasonal colours and capture it on film or canvas.

Our most flexible journey with time to savour the season. Designed for artists, photographers, walkers and those who just like a more relaxed pace. By focusing on Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Phobjikha and Haa in Western Bhutan, time can be spent exploring these stunning valleys on foot rather than moving on each day. This itinerary is paced with consecutive nights in these contrasting landscapes, short drives and optional walks or longer hikes. For the more intrepid there is also an optional 2 day trek.

# MAP OF BHUTAN



DAY	ITINERARY	ACCOMMODATION	TRAVEL DETAILS
1	<p><b>Arrive Kathmandu</b></p> <p>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 long journey.</p>	Kantipur Temple House, deluxe room	Airport to Hotel – 40 mins
2	<p><b>To Paro</b></p> <p>The flight from Kathmandu to Paro is a visual treat. You will be met and transferred to the airport to enable you to check in early to get seats 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, travel down willow lined streets to your hotel. If there is time this afternoon take a walk through Paro Town, past Ugyen Pelri Palace and the main archery ground, across the traditional covered bridge Nyami Zam over the Pa Chhu River and join devotees on their way up to Rinpung Dzong (Fortress on a Heap of Jewels). From here, head up to the former watch tower or Ta Dzong, housing Bhutan’s National Museum (damage by the 2011 earthquake has meant a reduction in the exhibits) and take in the wonderful views of the valley.</p>	Rema Resort, Paro	Flight 1.5 hours
3	<p><b>Dochu Laa to Ponakha</b></p> <p>This morning you will really get a sense of being in the mountains as you ascend to the colourful Dochu Laa pass where you will hopefully see clear views of the snow-capped mountains to the north. Generally the views from the pass are clearer first thing in the morning - so it is best to start as early as possible. Take time to visit the ornate Druk Wangyal Lhakhang (temple) and perhaps a tea break before descending into Punakha valley. As you descend into the subtropical valley of Punakha, you will notice the forest changing in character from the rhododendrons, pine and evergreen to huge leaved tropical trees. This afternoon, a gentle walk passed farmhouses and across the fields to Chimi Lhakhang, a 'fertility' temple with an interesting story, set on a small hill.</p>	Meri Puensum Resort	Punakha to Paro (129km/4.5hrs)

### **Punakha Dzong and Chorten Walk**

4

This morning you 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 and by vehicle (or raft - ask Jade) along the river (2-3hrs) - head back down into the valley to visit the spectacular Punakha Dzong and for a picnic lunch.

The Dzong is arguably the most beautiful Dzong in Bhutan, take time to explore some of the magnificent temples. Rest of afternoon at leisure or if there is time you may like to visit the village of Talo, high on the hill above the valley

Meri Puensum  
Resort

### **Samdingkha Hike**

5

Driving back down towards Punakha Dzong, start this walk from behind the dzong and strike out on a picturesque woodland walking trail along the Mo Chhu (river) to the tiny village of Samdingkha (look out for wildlife such as otters and fishing eagles along the way). The trail loops back through lush rice paddies dotted with homesteads before crossing the longest suspension bridge in Bhutan. Our hike takes us well off the beaten tourist path to witness the very traditional local way of life.

Meri Puensum  
Resort

### **Drive to Phobjikha Valley & Optional Shashi Laa Hike**

6

Today you will head further east and there will be the chance to make part of the journey on foot, via the Shashi Laa pass. This is quite a tough half day walk, (the start of the trek is steep uphill) and more about the challenge than the views. You start the day with a quick stop in Wangdue at the charming Dzong which is being rebuilt after a huge fire in 2012. You should be able to see some traditional craftsmanship and visit an incense maker. From here you head further east into the Black mountains where those wanting to do the hike will be dropped off. The vehicles will turn off the main road and climb through dwarf bamboo forests into Phobjikha valley. The rest of the afternoon to enjoy your new surroundings.

Hotel Dewachen,  
Gangtey

3hrs drive  
Punakha to  
Phobjikha  
valley

### **Gangtey Goempa & Valley Walk**

7

Stop by the small Sunday market in Paro town before being taken along the national 'highway' to the capital of Thimphu, stopping off at Thamchu Lhakhang on the way. The view over Thimphu from the big Buddha statue helps get our bearings before heading into Thimphu town. A stop at the weekend market is a must. Lunch at one of the capital's relaxed cafes. Later this afternoon head up to Mothitang to see Bhutan's national animal, the rare and elusive Takin. 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.

Hotel Dewachen,  
Gangtey

### **Drive to Thimphu**

8

A longer drive today as you head back west, over the Dochu Laa pass to Thimphu. Stop off again at the Dochu Laa pass for another chance to see the spectacular mountain vistas. In Thimphu, visit the weekend market, which should be in full swing. Thimphu is the best place to buy souvenirs or handicrafts and your guide will be able to help you with any purchases. This evening dine at one of Thimphu's international restaurants.

Namgay Heritage  
Hotel, Thimphu

5hrs drive  
Phobjikha  
valley to  
Thimphu

### **Thimphu sightseeing**

9

After breakfast, a sightseeing tour of Thimphu. Visit the memorial chorten, which is so important to Thimphu's inhabitants. A stop at the weekend market is a must if you did not have time yesterday. Depending on opening hours, guest interests and time, your guide may include some of the following in your schedule: The National Memorial Chorten, Trashi Chhoe Dzong (fortress of the glorious religion), the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, the National Textile Museum, the Folk Heritage Museum, the Paper factory or other workshops. The alternative would be to go for a hike to Tango & Cheri Monastery at the head of the valley or just to relax and explore the shops and cafes by yourself.

Namgay Heritage  
Hotel, Thimphu

### Drive from Thimphu to Haa

- 10 This morning there will be a little time to visit one or two sights that you missed yesterday before heading west to the sleepy valley of Haa. Enroute head to the big Buddha on top of the hill to see the whole city laid out before you. Head west to the quiet and often overlooked Haa valley. Visit the famous Lhakhang Nagpo and Karpo temples before settling in to your accommodation for tonight , a converted traditional farmhouse
- Lechuna Heritage Hotel, Haa
- 3hrs drive Thimphu to Haa

### Haa Valley Walk

- 11 Haa is a perfect walking destination. Today hike or cycle through meadows and small hamlets in this rural valley where you may see farmers harvesting buckwheat or barley or herders grazing their yaks or cattle. You may be invited to help thresh the grain, or into one of the houses where you can see first hand how rural Bhutanese live. You may be offered yaks cheese or butter tea with toasted barley to snack on, or perhaps fresh walnuts which grow in the valley.
- Lechuna Heritage Hotel, Haa

### Haa to Paro via Chele Laa Pass

- 12 Today you head back to Paro via the Chele Laa 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. Spend some time at the pass then walk above the tree line along the ridge that divides Paro and Haa valley. The short steep descent from the top will take you to the nunnery of Kila Gompa. It is about a 20 minute walk through woodland along a path lined with small white chortens back to the road where the vehicles will be waiting. If you do not want to do the ridge hike, you can visit the nunnery from the road. Head back into Paro where you can spend the rest of the day at leisure, perhaps with a hot stone bath. Alternatively visit the lovely Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the oldest temples in Bhutan with its magic orange tree that bears fruit all year round and the interesting and unusually shaped Dungtse Lhakhang (take a torch).
- Gantey Palace, Paro
- 3hrs drive Haa to Paro



### **Bumdra Monastery Trek**

13

Today you start the day climbing through forests. With plenty of breaks, and fortified with water, a snack and blessings from spinning prayer wheels, it should take 2 to 3 hours to reach camp a good pace, but make sure you take time to take in your surroundings. The first two hours are upwards through deep ancient forest all the way to the little temple Chhoe Chhoe Tse Lhakhang, where your efforts are rewarded with spectacular views towards the main Himalayan range and back southwards where the runway at the airport is a tiny strip in the valley far below. There is a final steep pull before the trail traverses then pops out onto high, wide meadows dotted with sacred chortens and prayer flags. If you arrive in good time, you will have time to visit the monastery up a ladder and through a trapdoor and also climb a sky burial peak (about 4000m) for even better views, returning in time for a slap up dinner as the sun sets over the mountains.

Camping  
(Elevation: 3,800m)

3 - 4 hours to camp  
(elevation gain 1,000m)  
2-3 hours return trek to peak

### **Taksang Monastery and Paro Valley**

14

Awakened with 'bed tea' you can peak out at the morning mountain vista from your bed before joining your guide for a hearty and leisurely open air breakfast. Bid farewell to any monks in residence before following the path downwards towards Sangtopelri (Heaven on Earth), and eventually Taksang Goemba (the Tiger's Nest monastery), which you should have to yourselves and the monks at this early hour. From here head down to where your vehicle will be waiting. Visit Drukgyel Dzong before returning to your hotel for a hot stone bath or traditional treatment (book in advance).

Gantey Palace, Paro

5 hours depending on time taken in monasteries  
Elevation loss: 1,500m

### **Depart Paro**

15

An early start for another spectacular flight over the Himalayas. On arrival back in Kathmandu you have the rest of the day at leisure to relax in the famous Dwarikas Hotel or to explore Kathmandu city. The hotel is a great place to escape the chaos of Kathmandu at the end of your tour, but if you would like to arrange guided sightseeing please ask us for our half day tours or longer extensions in Nepal.

Dwarikas,  
Kathmandu

Flight 1.5hrs

### **Depart KTM**

16

You will be collected and transfer to the airport to check in at least 2.5hrs before your flight home.

Transfer  
45mins

# Savouring Bhutan

## 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](mailto: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.

