



Bhutan in Style

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.



BHUTAN IN STYLE



This journey has been designed to get the most from Bhutan in a short amount of time whilst staying in some of the country's finest properties.

Visit the compact capital, Thimpu, and the calm valley of Paro where you will find the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery. Travel eastwards over the fabulous Dochu Laa pass, with its views of the Eastern Himalaya to the subtropical valley of Punakha with its fantastic Dzong. Walk through farmland and villages and get to see first hand how local Bhutanese people live. Visit the temple of the Divine Madman.

MAP OF BHUTAN



DAY	ITINERARY	ACCOMMODATION	TRAVEL DETAILS
1	<p>Fly to Paro and drive on to Thimphu</p> <p>On arrival in Paro, you will be met by your guide and driver and 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. Check into your hotel and have your first taste of Bhutanese food at one of the capital's restaurants. Later that 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, and if you wish to stretch your legs, there are great views of the town and Dzong on a lateral hike through the forests (1-1.5hr) to Wanguetse and Dechenphodrang monasteries.</p>	The 5* Taj Tashi Hotel, Thimphu	Airport to Hotel – 40 mins
2	<p>Dochu Laa and to Punakha</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 enjoy 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 pine and evergreen to huge leaved tropical trees. After lunch walk through as small hamlet and paddy fields to a small temple on a hill dedicated to the 'Divine Madman'. Round off the day with a riverside walk with views of the Dzong.</p>	Uma Punakha	Thimphu to Punakha; 80km, 3 hours
3	<p>Punakha Dzong and chorten walk</p> <p>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. From here are the most magnificent views. Afterwards, 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. Time this afternoon to relax or to visit one of the surrounding villages.</p>	Uma Punakha	Punakha to Paro; 129km, 4.5 hours

Rafting along the Mo Chhu

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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. From here raft down the river. The first couple of rapids are the most difficult (easy Class II+) and the remainder is a fairly easy float through a beautiful canyon.

Uma Punakha

To Paro via Thimphu

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Today you head back over the Dochu Laa pass to Paro. If it is clear spend some time at the pass taking in the fantastic views before heading down in to Thimphu for lunch. If there are any sights that you missed on Sunday (because of weekend closures) you could visit these now. This afternoon back in Paro, visit Paro town, the National Museum and walk down to Paro's Dzong. If there is time, visit the lovely Kyichu Lhakhang or perhaps try your hand at archery on a local range.

Uma Paro

Punakha to Paro; 129km, 4.5 hours

Chele La hike

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Head up into the mountains today to the Chele La pass, with its wealth of flora and fauna. Make sure you have warm clothes up here as it can get cold. Spend some time at the pass and then walk above the tree-line along the ridge that divides Paro and Haa Valleys. The walk is not long but it can be hard work at this altitude. The short steep descent from the top takes you to the nunnery of Kila Gompa. It is a short 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 hike from the ridge, you can visit the nunnery from the road instead. From the pass, there will be the option to hire mountain bikes to freewheel all the way back down to the Paro valley. You may like (or need!) to try a hot stone bath, which your guide can book for you.

Uma Paro

Paro to Chele Laa pass; 40km, 1.5 hours

Bumdra Monastery Trek

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 at a good pace, but make sure you take the time to appreciate 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 above the clouds on the Bumdra mountain plateau

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Taktsang Monastery and Paro Valley

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 Taktsang Goemba (the Tiger's Nest Monastery), which you and the monks should have to yourselves 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 hotstone bath or traditional treatment (book in advance).

Uma Paro

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Depart Paro

Transfer to the airport to catch your flight home or on to your next destination.

Transfer to airport

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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.

