



## **9 DAYS TOUR OF WEST BHUTAN WITH HIKES**

### **TAILORMADE TOUR**

<b>OUR PRICE</b>	<b>LAND ONLY: £ 2250 PER PERSON ON TWIN SHARING BASIS PRICES ARE ALL INCLUSIVE WITH NO HIDDEN OR LOCAL PAYMENTS</b>
<b>FLIGHTS</b>	<b>WE CAN ARRANGE TO BOOK INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS FOR YOU THROUGH OUR PARTNER TRAVEL AGENT OR YOU CAN ARRANGE YOUR OWN FLIGHTS AND WE WILL ARRANGE FOR YOUR TRANSFER FROM THE PLACE WHERE THE TOUR STARTS</b>
<b>BEST TIME OF VISIT</b>	<b>SEPTEMBER-JUNE</b>
<b>NO OF DAYS</b>	<b>9 DAYS</b>

## Overview

In this tour visit all the important sights of West Bhutan with an option to have a slightly more active tour filled with day hikes and biking (optional). The kingdom of Bhutan is blessed with amazing views and landscapes and hiking the many trails into the Himalayan mountains is a great way to discover this place. This trip is perfect for those who would like to have an active tour but come back to the comfort of a lodge/ hotel at the end of a strenuous day.

Destinations: Paro- Thimphu- Punakha- Haa- Paro

## Detailed Itinerary

### **Day 1:** Paro- Thimphu (50.5 km, 1 hr 16 min)

Arrive at Paro International Airport from Delhi, Calcutta, Kathmandu or Bangkok. Paro is situated in a beautiful valley at 2280 metres and is a fitting introduction to this charming kingdom. Your guide will meet you and take you on a short one-hour drive along the Paro and Thimphu river valleys to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital, at 2320 metres. You can stop on the way to take in the magnificent Tamchhog Lhakhang, the hereditary place of worship for Bhutan's iron bridge builder. Depending on flight timing we can suggest some sightseeing for today. Take an afternoon walk around town and soak in the atmosphere of this magical capital with its busy shops and bazaars and photogenic citizens in national dress. Overnight in Thimphu

Accommodation: Phuntsho Pelri or similar

### **Day 2:** Thimphu

This morning you can do a hike to Thadra Gumpa(5 hours, 13 km, moderate). The hike takes you through poplar and blue pine forest where during the monsoon season you can find golden chanterelle mushrooms. You will have excellent views of the Buddha Dordenma statue overlooking Thimphu city. Thadra Gumpa is a beautiful isolated monastery, which means "royal cliff" and was constructed by Tsugla Jamtsho in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Each year monks come here to meditate during the Yarnay (holy month).

Later on try your hand at the national sport of archery, a traditional pastime still popular today throughout Bhutan. You may also like to visit the revered Memorial Chorten and Changangkha temple, perched on a hill above the town, which contains beautiful wall paintings and hundreds of religious scriptures written in gold. Overnight in Thimphu

Accommodation: Phuntsho Pelri or similar

### **Day 3:** Thimphu- Punakha (85 km, 2 hr 30 mins)

In the morning drive approximately 3 hours to the old capital, Punakha, via Dochu La pass at 3050 metres, where we will stop for a hot drink and enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalaya ranges. You will notice the change of climate and vegetation as we approach low-lying Punakha at 1250 metres. Take a pleasant walk for an hour or so across the terraced fields of Sopsokha village to Chimi Lhakhang (Temple of Fertility) built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the 'Divine Madman' (Lama Drukpa Kuenley). Then we will visit the imposing Punakha Dzong, "Palace of Great Happiness". Built in 1637, it is strategically placed at the confluence of two rivers, the Po Chu and the Mo Chu. Overnight in Punakha

Accommodation: Meri Puensum or similar

**Day 4:** Punakha - This morning you may like to try some rafting on the Po Chu and Mo Chu rivers. In the afternoon take a gentle hike to Chorten Ningpo, which dates back to the 17th Century (3 to 4 hours, easy to moderate). The chorten is a little-known spot with a magnificent statue of Maitreya (the future Buddha) and images of the great lamas of the Drukpa lineage. This magical spot was once a dense forest believed to be inhabited by evil spirits. The great oak tree outside the monastery is said to have grown out of the blazing log that the 'Divine Madman' threw (the tree's bark is still black from where it was burnt). In 2005 the monastery began to house orphans from the nearby village and founding a small Buddhist educational institution where the children can study traditional Buddhist scriptures and texts as well as Western subjects. The hike back to Punakha is around 45 minutes, going past Thodrup Lhakhang. Overnight in Punakha.

Accommodation: Meri Puensum or similar

**Day 5:** Punakha-Paro (125 km, 3 hr 20 mins)

In the morning hike an hour or so up to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten, high on the hill across the other side of the valley (easy hike). Then we will return to Paro, a drive of approximately 4 hours. In Paro visit the impressive Paro Rinpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture. Then you can visit a local farmhouse for tea or dinner allowing you to experience traditional Bhutanese village life. Take the opportunity to try the restorative properties of a hot stone bath! Overnight in Paro.

Accommodation: Olathang Resort or similar

**Day 6:** Paro-Haa (63.8 km, 2 hrs)

Today we will drive to Haa at 2670 metres – the drive is around 3 hours and crosses the Chele La pass at 3800m from where you will have a view of Mount Jomolhari to the north as well as down to the Haa valley. First we will stop to visit Kila Gompa a nunnery inhabited by about 30 nuns who live a life of contemplation and seclusion with daily prayer and spiritual practice. The community is one of the oldest of seven nunneries in Bhutan and was initially established in the early 9th century as a meditation site. The main temple houses ancient statues of Chenrezig and Guru Rinpoche among others. After visiting the nunnery you can follow an old trail for about an hour and a half uphill through rhododendron and hemlock forest towards Chele La pass where your vehicle will be waiting for you. Then continue your drive down into Haa town. Haa has only recently opened to tourists and the town is still very small – as yet there are only one or two basic restaurants and local lodges so the area remains quite remote. A great opportunity to view this beautiful rural scene. From Haa you can walk to Katso village and from there you can visit Lhakhang Karpo and Lhakhang Nagpo.

*Option to do mountain biking today in place of the hike. Overnight in Haa.*

**Day 7:** Haa-Paro (63.8 km, 2 hrs)

Drive about 30 minutes from Haa town to Kana village. Hike for about an hour and a half ascending gradually through blue pine and rhododendron forest to Gyensakha temple. From here you will have a view of Haa valley as well as down to Tsapay village school. Gyensakha temple is believed to have been founded by the Great Buddhist master Choley Tenzin in the 19th century. There is currently only one lay monk looking after the temple. The temple has a collection of interesting statues, the

most important of which is the Buddha of Long life. After visiting the temple, walk down towards Tsapay village. Your driver will be waiting to collect you in Tsapay village.

*Option to continue riding bikes today in place of the hike. Overnight in Paro.*

Accommodation: Olathang Resort or similar

### **Day 8: Paro**

Take a day walk to the 'Tiger's Nest', the sacred Taktshang monastery which clings to the rock face 900 metres above the valley floor. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site riding on a tigress. He subsequently meditated here for three months. It is one of Bhutan's most holy sites and draws pilgrims not only from Bhutan but also from neighbouring Buddhist countries. You can have lunch at the Taktshang cafeteria from where you get a spectacular view of the monastery. If you wish you can hike above the monastery to visit some other temples – the guide will arrange the hike depending on how far you want to go. If there is any time left for sightseeing after your hike your guide will suggest something for you to see. Overnight in Paro.

Accommodation: Olathang Resort or similar

**Day 9: Fly Out** - Early in the morning your guide will accompany you to the airport to see you off onto your flight and wish you Tashi Delek (goodbye and good luck).

### Tour Price includes

- All accommodation as mentioned above
- All meals
- Transportation
- English speaking local guide
- All entrance fees
- All sightseeing and hikes with experienced guides as mentioned in itinerary
- Bhutan Royalty and all taxes included
- Bhutan visa

### Tour Price excludes

- Flights
- Insurance
- Items of a personal nature

### **General information**

#### Accommodation

The accommodation included are all approved by Bhutan Tourism and equivalent to 3 star category hotels. Please let us know if you would like luxury hotels instead.

### Visas

We organise Bhutanese visas for you. If you are coming in or out via India you will need an Indian visa and you need to apply for this before you leave home. If you are in transit through India and don't leave the airport in theory you don't need a visa, but you should check with your international airline that they will allow you to fly without one. Also note that you can't check your luggage through all the way to Bhutan, so it is easier to manage this if you can go through immigration, collect your luggage and check in again from there. Don't forget to get a multiple entry visa if necessary. If you are flying with Druk Air or Bhutan Airlines and have a touchdown en route you don't need a visa for India/Nepal/Bangladesh, as you don't get off the plane. For Kathmandu if you are stopping over you can get a transit visa on arrival for a short visit for US\$5 or a 15-day visa for US\$25 – you need to take a passport photo with you. If you come in to Bhutan overland you should be sure to get your exit stamp for India at the immigration office and not at the border.

### Money

The Bhutanese unit of currency is called the ngultrum and is pegged to the Indian rupee. Ngultrum are not available outside Bhutan and you cannot easily convert Ngultrum back to dollars. You can spend Indian Rupees in Bhutan and they are at par with Ngultrum. For spending money you should bring dollars if possible, as they are the easiest currency to change. You get better exchange rates for high value (\$100) notes and also in some of the luxury hotels. Euros and sterling are also accepted throughout. Travellers' cheques are not really worthwhile, as the exchange rates are poor. If you do want to buy souvenirs, credit cards can be used now in most places, although you may want to bring cash for market purchases where they won't be. Visa is more readily accepted than MasterCard but there are places that you can use either. It is possible to use credit cards in a couple of ATM's in Paro and Thimphu, but only to draw out local currency and not foreign currency. So bring all the US\$ cash you think you might need as it is difficult to get hold of it in Bhutan.

### Vaccinations

We advise you may want to consider ensuring you are protected from typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio, hepatitis and rabies. Japanese encephalitis is also sometimes recommended but check with your doctor or travel clinic once you know the time of year and the nature of your itinerary. In any event you should bring insect repellent, as there is a risk of encountering biting insects even if they don't carry malaria.

### Druk Air/Tashi Air

For the best views if coming from Kathmandu it is worth sitting on the left of the plane as you fly into Paro (and on the right when you fly out). It is amazing how close you get to Everest and surrounding peaks! Unfortunately we are unable to influence seating in advance, so make sure you get to the airport in plenty of time to request this at check-in. Generally you should check in 2 hours before the flight. Luggage limits are 30kg per person in economy class and 40kg per person in business

class (in each case including carry-on bags), although they are generally fairly lax about excess weight and the excess baggage charge is not high.

### Smoking

Except in a few districts in the east of the country where there is a total ban on tobacco, smoking is still allowed in Bhutan but the sale of tobacco is prohibited. So if you need to smoke, bring your own and be prepared to be taxed on your supplies on entry to the country. There is also a recent law prohibiting smoking in offices and some public places.

### Communications

Overseas mobiles and blackberries generally don't work in Bhutan, although some report successful connections on the Vodafone network. If you want to you can purchase a SIM card for the B-mobile network and use this in your phone. Internet and wi-fi is also available in most of western Bhutan and in some other towns (including Bumthang), but it is patchy and intermittent with slow speeds.

### Rainfall

As a guide, rainfall in Thimphu and Paro is about 25mm a month in January to March, rising to 50mm in April and May, 75mm in June, and then a whopping 355mm in July, 300mm in August, 125mm in September, back down to 75mm in October, 25 mm in November and 0 in December.

