



Better Bhutan

Seven Days & Six Nights

This program is a first-time Bhutan experience that shows you the most important things to see in a relatively short period of time. You will have a private guide and transportation so you can begin any day. All meals are included. We use good quality government-approved hotels. You also have the option of a home stay one night. Our emphasis is on seeing as much as possible without sacrificing comfort, so no trekking is involved.



Day One: Arrive in Paro

Arrive in Paro after a spectacular flight that takes you deep into the Himalayas, affording awesome views of towering peaks, including the sacred Jumolhari and Jichu Drake peaks in Bhutan. Get a window seat on the right side of the plane to fully enjoy the stupendous landing approach at Paro International Airport. You will be met on arrival by your guide and personal driver and taken to your hotel.

After you check in and freshen up you begin your adventure with a visit to the Paro Dzong. (A dzong is temple fortress.) It was built in 1646 and now houses government offices and religious institutions, as do all dzongs in the kingdom. You will cross a traditional wooden bridge along the way.

Afterward you will visit Kyichu Lhakhang, the oldest temple in the country. In the evening you can stroll through the Paro market and town, which is compact and can be colorful, but don't expect any nightlife.

Day Two: Onward to Thimpu

After breakfast you drive to Thimphu, which is probably the world's smallest capital city. In the afternoon you visit the King's Memorial Chorten (built in memory of the third King of Bhutan who reigned from 1952-1972). A chorten is much the same as a stupa or chedi. Originally they were used as the final resting place of someone significant, or a relic of a saint.

You also visit Changgangkha Monastery, built in the 15th century. If it is open and you are up to climbing a long flight of stone steps you will be rewarded with sweeping views of the valley. The most important of the temple's statues is that of an eleven-headed manifestation of Lord Buddha that has 1,000 arms and 1,000 eyes.

Next, a stop at himpu Dzong, which now houses government ministries, and Simtokha Dzong. The latter was built on a rocky hill into which an annoying demon was imprisoned in the seventeenth century.

Next is the takin reserve to see the national animal. The takin is an odd-looking beast that might result from the union of a goat and an antelope. The takin is revered for its resilience in harsh conditions (even though it is endangered) and is also a part of Bhutanese mythology.

You will also make quick visits to several other places, including the National Library (which houses ancient manuscripts), and the School of Arts and Crafts, which teaches thirteen different crafts and from weaving and embroidery to carpentry and blacksmithing. We will also squeeze in a stop at the main post office for Bhutan's collectable stamps, which make great souvenirs and gifts.

Day Three: Wanguephodrang, a Tea Break and a Panorama of the Himalayas

Depart Thimpu this morning on a three-hour drive to Wangduephodrang. We take a tea break along the way at Dochu La (3,100 meters), where on a clear day you can get spectacular views of the Himalayas. This is a strategic pass that connects

the eastern and western halves of the country. The remarkable natural beauty and many prayer flags makes this seem a very serene place.

After lunch there is a short detour to Punakha, the former capital of Bhutan. Here you will visit the Punakha Dzong, which dates to 1637 and is considered one of the most beautiful in Bhutan.

On the way back from Punakha, you will stop at Metshina Village and take a 20-minute walk through the rice fields to Chimi Lakhang, a fertility temple, where you may receive a special fertility blessing if you think you need one. This temple is dedicated to a saint who is popularly known as "the Divine Madman." Although he was not a monk, he taught a revolutionary alternative to orthodox Buddhism and is remembered for his sexual prowess. Many homes and temples in this region are decorated with flying phalluses as a symbol of fertility and as a gesture of respect for the Divine Madman.

Overnight in Wangduephodrang.

Day Four: Ganteay, an 8th Century Monastery, and its Legendary Cranes

Today's excursion is to Ganteay, which takes you through dense forests of oak trees and rhododendrons. Once you arrive you will visit Ganteay Gumpa, a monastery with a golden roof. This is the only "Nyingmapa" (which means "ancient ones") monastery in this part of Bhutan. The Nyingmapas first established Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century.

The Phobjikha Valley is the home of the black-necked crane, which migrates in winter from Ladakh. The cranes use the golden roof as a beacon. Locals say the birds circle the temple three times before they land in the valley. Residents here use solar power since they are concerned that power lines might harm the cranes.

In the evening you can stroll through the town of Wangduephodrang and visit the shops. The nearby villages are known for their slate and stone carvings and bamboo work.

Overnight in Wangduephodrang.

Day Five: Lunch in Thimpu

You set out for Paro this morning with a stop in Thimphu for lunch and a visit to the weaving center in Changzomtok. By now you will probably have fallen in love with the colorful rustic textiles used for traditional garments here. The weaving center is a good place to find a last-minute treasure. The center trains rural women Bhutan's age-old methods of traditional hand weaving.

In the afternoon, you will continue the drive to Paro. In the evening you can explore Paro town.

Overnight in Paro.

Day Six: Exploring Paro

After breakfast we walk to Taktsang ("Tiger's Nest"), which is Bhutan's most famous monastery, perched on the edge of a steep cliff, about 900 meters above Paro Valley. The hike to reach the viewpoint to the monastery makes for a nice half-day excursion, and might be one of your best highlights of Bhutan (You can also travel on horse-back if you have physical limitations.)

After lunch, you will visit a local farm for a cooking lesson in the farmhouse kitchen. If you like, you can spend the night in the home's alter room, where you can make your own offerings and prayers. If you wish you can also take a hot stone bath.

Day Seven: You Depart (But you can stay longer!)

Your time is free until we take you to the airport for your departure flight.