

Hiker's Journey to Bhutan

TIGER'S NEST MONASTERY, PUNAKHA, BUMTHANG, AND A MASKED DANCE FESTIVAL



TRIP DATES

2024

November 3-14, 2024 Jakar Festival

November 6-17, 2024 Black Necked Crane Festival

2025

March 7-18, 2025 Punakha Festival

April 2-13, 2025 Paro Festival

October 3-14, 2025 Thimphu Festival

October 31-November 11, 2025

Prakher Festival

November 6-17, 2025 Black Necked Crane Festival



Wilderness Travel

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MASKED DANCE FESTIVAL

With exuberant festivals to honor the guardian deities, gold-spired temples in every valley, and a guiding philosophy of “Gross National Happiness,” Bhutan is truly one of the world’s last Shangri-Las. Combining hiking and cultural exploration, we transport you into this rare world, roaming the ancient trails and taking time to experience local life, including a private visit to a nunnery and attending a tsechu—a colorful Tibetan Buddhist celebration with elaborate dance-dramas. Three days of our journey are in the ethereal Bumthang region, the spiritual center of the kingdom.



Wilderness Travel

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Itinerary

Please Note: Due to the timing of our group flights to and from Bhutan, all participants must arrive in Bangkok, Thailand, at least one day before Day 1. Trip members will also need to spend the night in Bangkok on Day 12, the last day of the trip. All overnight(s) in Bangkok are on your own (at additional cost).

A note about Bhutan's festivals: It is an extraordinary privilege to witness one of Bhutan's traditional tsechu festivals, a celebration of events in the life of Padmasambhava, the 8th century master who brought Buddhism to Tibet and Bhutan. He is considered by members of the Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism to be their founder. Such festivals are celebrated throughout Bhutan, and are attended by Bhutanese from all around the countryside, who leave their farms and dress in their finery to gather and celebrate with friends. Activities include sacred dance-dramas performed by monks or laymen wearing costumes of silk and brocade and, for certain dances, masks representing animals or deities. The dances take place in beautiful monastery courtyards under the brilliant cobalt sky. Each trip will witness one of these festivals.

The itinerary below is our planned schedule. Please note that hiking times are general estimates and vary depending on local weather, daily trail conditions, and festival schedules. Internal flights are also subject to change.

DAY 1

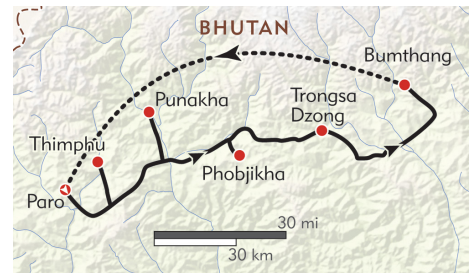
PARO, BHUTAN (7,500') / THIMPHU (7,600')

An early morning flight brings us from Bangkok, Thailand, to Bhutan's emerald-green Paro Valley, where shrines dot the landscape and graceful willow trees grow along the edge of the Paro River as it winds through fields and farmlands. On arrival, we are met by our Trip Leader for a transfer to Thimphu, which was a small, wooded farming valley up until 1961, when it became Bhutan's official national capital. En route, we'll stop at the Iron Bridge, a large chain bridge built in the 15th century laced with prayer flags leading to Tachog Lhakhang. After arrival in Thimphu and lunch at a local restaurant, we will visit the national memorial chorten and the beautiful Giant Buddha statue, perched on a hilltop overlooking the valley. Overnight at hotel...LD
Driving Details: Approximately 1 hour

DAY 2

THIMPHU / CHERI MONASTERY

A short hike through a beautiful forest of oak and rhododendron brings us up to Cheri Monastery, a 17th century monastery and Buddhist university where we'll see monks studying and carrying out their daily rituals. Later we head to Sangay Gang, where there is a sanctuary for the cattle-sized animal called the takin, the national animal of Bhutan. These rare Himalayan creatures resemble miniature American bison, standing about five feet high with large heads and front quarters. Overnight at hotel...BLD
Hiking Details: Approximately 2 hours, 2.5 miles, 1,200 feet ascent/descent, Maximum Altitude: 9,600 feet



TRIP DETAILS AT-A-GLANCE

Length:	12 days
Arrive:	Paro, Bhutan
Depart:	Paro, Bhutan
Lodging:	7 nights lodges, 4 nights hotels
Meals:	All meals included (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
Activity:	Cultural Adventures, Hiking / Trekking
Trip Level:	1 2 3+ 4 5 6 7 hiking days on moderate trails, 2-6 hours a day, altitudes between 4,100-12,900 feet

HIGHLIGHTS

- Attend a wildly colorful Buddhist tsechu festival
- Explore the peaceful Bumthang region, spiritual center of this Himalayan kingdom
- Hike the pilgrim trail to the striking monastic retreat of Taktsang
- Private welcome at a remote nunnery, with the opportunity to join a guided meditation



Itinerary (cont'd)



DAY 3

THIMPHU / FOREST HIKE / PUNAKHA (4,500')

Today, we drive up through a lushly forested landscape to the Dochu La (10,000'), whose summit is festooned with fluttering prayer flags and 108 chortens (stupas) dedicated to Bhutan's continued peace and happiness. From the pass, we hike a quiet trail through a mixed forest of spruce, rhododendron, hemlock, oak, pine, and juniper to isolated and seldom-visited Lungchuzekha Monastery (11,800'), surrounded by prayer flags. On a clear day, we enjoy sweeping views of the Bhutan Himalaya, including Gangkhar Puensum, Bhutan's highest peak and the highest unclimbed mountain in the world. We return to the Dochu La, board our waiting vehicles, and descend to the terraced fields of Punakha. Overnight at

hotel...BLD

Hiking Details: Approximately 4 hours, 5.3 miles, 1,800 feet ascent/descent,
Maximum Altitude: 11,800 feet

Driving Details: Approximately 3 hours

DAY 4

PUNAKHA VALLEY (4,500')

From the village of Nezigang, we hike up through cultivated fields and small hamlets to visit the Khamsum Yuley Namgay Chorten (5,200'), a shrine built recently by the royal family. The shrine is an elaborate structure with a rainbow of Guru Rimpoche images and superb views of the Punakha Valley. After a picnic lunch along the Mo Chu River (with opportunities for birding), we visit the 17th century Punakha Dzong (fortress), Bhutan's former winter capital. Built in 1637 at the confluence of the Mo Chu and Po Chu (the "Mother" and "Father" rivers), the winter capital was established here in part because Punakha is a warm valley with a relatively low altitude of approximately 4,500 feet, allowing for the production of two rice crops each year, along with oranges, mangos, and bananas. The Punakha Dzong is an architectural wonder and seat of the head abbot of Bhutan. It has survived six fires, two glacial lake bursts, and an earthquake. This labyrinthine dzong has played a pivotal role in Bhutan's history and has the official name of Druk Pungthang Decchen Phodrang, which translates as "the palace of great happiness." Overnight at hotel...BLD
Hiking Details: Approximately 1.5 hours, 1.9 miles, 700 feet ascent/descent,
Maximum Altitude: 5,200 feet

DAY 5

PUNAKHA / PHOBJIKHA (9,800')

We head to the village of Lobesa for a half-hour walk through mustard fields to Chimi Lhakhang, a monastery and fertility temple dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint known popularly as "the divine madman" and a folk hero in Bhutan for his unconventional ways. Drukpa Kuenley originally

built a chorten on the site in the 14th century. The temple, flanked by nearly 100 tall prayer flags, sits atop a picturesque hill and has long been a pilgrimage site for childless couples.

Boarding our vehicles, we drive to the Phobjikha Valley. With its alpine setting on the western slope of the Black Mountains in the absolute heart of Bhutan, the beautiful Phobjikha Valley is a high-altitude glacial valley featuring mixed forests of pine and rhododendron, with brushy grasslands on the valley floor. In the winter, a flock of approximately 200-300 black-necked cranes migrates to this valley from Tibet to spend the winter foraging in the valley. The cranes are considered harbingers of good luck and have long been respected by the residents of the valley. Their arrival signals the villagers that it's time to pack up and move down to lower, warmer climes (the valley is snowed-in during the winter months).

In Phobjikha, we explore the gold-roofed Gangtey Monastery, which sits on a prominent hilltop in the valley. Time permitting, we will take a nature walk and visit a local farmhouse or a small monastery. Overnight at Yue Loki Guest House (or similar)...BLD

Hiking Details: Approximately 40 minutes, 1.25 miles, 200 feet ascent/descent, Maximum Altitude: 4,700 feet

Driving Details: Approximately 3 hours

DAY 6

PELE LA PASS HIKE / TRONGSA (7,215')

A short drive brings us to Pele La Pass (11,220'), one of Bhutan's highest and traditionally considered the boundary between west and central Bhutan. We may see local craftspeople selling fine yak-hair products at the roadside here. From the pass, we set off on the Trans Bhutan Trail, which descends to the meadows of Longtey village (be sure to keep an eye out for the remote yak herder camps that can be seen scattered around the valley). We'll visit Rukubji's village lhakhang (temple), also known as Kuenzang Choling. It is believed that this temple was built some 300 years ago by a Lama named Tshendhen Duelwa. Unlike most temples, it is not built on a ridge with a view out over a valley, but rather on an extended plateau and close to two rivers. Legend has it that the Lama built the temple on top of the head of a snake-demoness that he subdued in the same location. After lunch, we drive to Trongsa, the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family. On our way, we stop and stretch our legs at Chendibji Chorten, a handsome stupa built in the 19th century. Overnight at Norbu Lingkha Resort or Yangkhil Resort...BLD

Hiking Details: 4 hours

Driving Details: 3-4 hours

DAY 7

TRONGSA / BUMTHANG (9,185')

Before leaving Trongsa, we visit the Trongsa Dzong and Ta Dzong Museum, which focuses on the history of the





monarchs of Bhutan, with many rare artifacts on display. This fortress was the residence of the Penlop (governor) of Trongsa in the early 1900s who went on to consolidate political control over Bhutan to become the country's first king; the current monarch, who was crowned in 2008, is the fifth in this lineage. In ancient times, people traveling from eastern Bhutan had to pass through the dzong entrance. We continue our journey with a drive across Yutong La Pass (11,630') to enter the Chumey Valley, which, along with Choekhor (West), Tang (East), and Ura Mountain valleys, make up the general area referred to as Bumthang. We end at the village of Jakar (8,695') in Bumthang Valley for overnight at Gongkhar Lodge or Valley Resort...BLD

Driving Details: Approximately 2-3 hours

DAYS 8-9

BUMTHANG

Nowhere else in Bhutan are there as many temples and monasteries as in Bumthang, and it is also one of the most picturesque regions of the country, with sweeping agricultural valleys dotted with small villages, and forested mountainsides sheltering centuries-old monastic complexes and religious retreats. We will spend these two days exploring the valley. On one day a hike brings us along the Chamkhar River and through meadows and pine forests to the village of Thangbi, where we visit its gumpa (if the caretaker is present). Thangbi was founded in the late 1500s by the 4th Shamar Rimpoche, a patriarch of Tibet's Karma Kargyüpa sect. After crossing a suspension bridge, we reach Nga Lhakhang (Swan Land), and visit a local village. In Jakar we explore two important monasteries: Jambay and Kurje. Jambay was originally built by Tibet's King Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century as one of the 108 temples used to subdue the demoness lying across the Tibetan Plateau; this temple is said to pin down her left knee. Kurje is a complex of three temples and one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Bhutan.



While in Bumthang, we'll have a chance to sample araa, the local wine, as well as butter tea, and be able to watch a demonstration of how the local buckwheat noodles (puta) are made at a traditional farmhouse. We also have a private visit to Pemacholing Nunnery, where nuns make torma (a ritual cake) and guide us in an optional meditation. Overnights at Gongkhar Lodge or Valley Resort on each day...BLD each day

Hiking Details: Approximately 3 hours, 4.3 miles, 600 feet ascent, Maximum Altitude: 9,000 feet

Driving Details: Approximately 45 minutes

DAY 10

BUMTHANG / PARO

A morning flight brings us from Bumthang to Paro. In the afternoon, we visit the fascinating National Museum of Bhutan, with its collection of ancient weapons, masks, clothing, and other artifacts. We also visit nearby Paro Dzong, an imposing fortress originally built by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. Time permitting, we will have the opportunity to witness a traditional archery competition (and our Trip Leader can give us all a lesson!). Overnight at hotel...BLD

Please note that regularly scheduled flights are not always available from Bumthang to Paro, and they are subject to last-minute government changes. If this is the case, we may need to book a charter flight on Day 9 instead of Day 10.

DAY 11

TAKTSANG MONASTERY (10,200')

Today we hike up through pine forests festooned with Spanish moss to reach the striking monastic retreat of Taktsang, the "Tiger's Nest," built into a sheer cliff face high above the Paro Valley. This is the most famous temple in Bhutan and one of the venerated pilgrim sites of the Himalayan world. Padmasambhava, the great 8th century Buddhist saint and teacher, is thought to have landed at this spot after flying over the mountains from Tibet on the back of a tigress, thus bringing the teachings of Buddhism to Bhutan. The primary temple was built around Padmasambhava's meditation cave in 1684. We stop for tea en route at a teahouse midway with fantastic views of the monastery, then return here for a vegetarian buffet lunch on the way back. Return to Paro in the afternoon, with some time to explore the town and visit the bazaar. In the evening, we gather for a festive Farewell Dinner. Overnight at hotel...BLD
Hiking Details: Approximately 3-4 hours, 4.6 miles, 2,200 feet ascent/descent, Maximum Altitude: 10,200 feet

DAY 12

DEPART

We transfer to Paro Airport for our return flight to Bangkok...B



Please Note: Actual festival dates and activities are always subject to change (even once the trip has begun). The itinerary and/or dates may be altered to adjust to the final festival schedule. Sometimes, viewing a festival may not be possible if dates are changed at the last minute and beyond the control of Wilderness Travel.



Trip Cost, Payment & Insurance

TRIP COST

Prices are per person, valid through 2024

\$7095 (4-15 members)

Single supplement: \$1745

Internal airfare: \$1495-\$2195 (subject to change)

Bhutan Visa Fee (WT acquires visa for you): \$40

2025 Trip Costs: Please call for pricing

To offer the lowest possible cost, our trips are priced according to the number of participants on the trip. All costs are per person, based on double occupancy. If you wish to have a single room, you must pay the single supplement fee. Please note that Wilderness Travel staff, or guests of Wilderness Travel such as travel writers, photographers, or leaders-in-training, are not included in the tier pricing count.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

Because the prices published for our program are set so far in advance of the trip dates, we are occasionally faced with exceptional cost increases and/or currency fluctuations that affect the actual cost of running the trip. In most years, no price changes are necessary. However, we do reserve the right to raise or lower the trip price if there is a significant change in costs or exchange rates. If this is the case, your final invoice will reflect the difference in trip cost.

TRIP COST INCLUDES

- Expert leadership of a Wilderness Travel Trip Leader and local guides
- Accommodations; please note that rooms with double beds are usually not available in Bhutan. Most lodge rooms are twin-bedded.
- All meals included as indicated in the Detailed Itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Government taxes and fees
- Land transportation, airport transfers for passengers as noted

TRIP COST DOES NOT INCLUDE

International airfare and airfare within Bhutan, hotels in Bangkok, airport transfers for individual arrival or departure, any meals not specified after each itinerary day, airport departure taxes, optional tipping or gratuities to leaders or staff, additional hotel nights that may be necessitated by airline schedule changes or other factors, pre-trip expenses of medical immunizations (if any), travel insurance, or passports and visas; and other expenses of a personal nature (alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation: \$600

90 days prior to departure: Balance

CANCELLATION AND TRANSFER FEE SCHEDULE

Up to 91 days prior to departure: No charge!

61-90 days prior to departure: 25% of trip cost

46-60 days prior to departure: 50% of trip cost

45 days or less: 100% of trip cost

MANDATORY EMERGENCY EVACUATION INSURANCE

Please note: Insurance for emergency evacuation is required for this trip. Call for more details.

Extend Your Adventure!

To help you make the most of your adventure, we've created several exciting trip extensions. For detailed information, including full itineraries and complete pricing, please visit our webpage and click on "Extend Your Trip": <https://www.wildernesstravel.com/trip/bhutan-hiking-festival-tour/>

TEMPLES OF ANGKOR EXTENSION

With the haunting remains of temples and shrines scattered across a tropical landscape, Angkor is a lasting monument to the glory of a bygone Khmer civilization and one of the wonders of the modern world. With a private guide, discover majestic temples adorned with intricate bas-reliefs or entwined by encroaching vegetation, climb up towers for sunset views of the countryside, contemplate the past as you pause beside huge moats and man-made lakes, and pass through imposing gateways decorated with colossal sculptured Buddha images.

4 days. From \$1195

BANGKOK EXTENSION

Discover the wealth of beautiful cultural monuments of Bangkok, one of Asia's most exciting cities. With a private guide, journey by private longtail boat through the winding klongs (waterways) of the Chao Phraya River, then spend the day visiting the city's ornate and beautiful sites, including Wat Arun, Bangkok's most well-known landmark, the dazzling Grand Palace, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the enormous gold-plated Reclining Buddha, and the vibrant market at Pak Klong Talad, where a vast variety of orchids and colorful flowers are sold.

3 days. From \$995



Arrival & Departure

Upon confirming your trip reservation, we will send you a Welcome Packet that includes a list of documents (passport, visas, etc.) required for your trip. Please feel free to call if you would like this information before making your air arrangements.

ARRIVAL & MEETING PLACE

Bangkok, Thailand

Suggested Airport: Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK)

Suggested Date & Time: At least one day prior to Day 1

Meeting Place: Your trip begins in Paro, Bhutan. However, you must arrive in Bangkok at least one day prior to Day 1, due to the timing of the Bangkok/Paro group flight (Wilderness Travel will book this flight for all trip members as part of the “internal airfare”). Please note that overnights in Bangkok are on your own (at additional cost).

On Day 1, the Bangkok/Paro flight usually departs very early in the morning, between 4:30 am and 7:30 am (subject to change). You will meet your Wilderness Travel Trip Leader upon arrival at the Paro International Airport (they will not be with you in Bangkok). They will be waiting for the group outside of the customs area, holding a Wilderness Travel sign.

DEPARTURE

Bangkok, Thailand

Suggested Airport: Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK)

Suggested Date & Time: Spend the night in Bangkok on Day 12, and depart anytime the next day (or later, if you would like to extend your time in Bangkok)

On Day 12 (the last day of your trip), you will be transferred to the Paro International Airport for the Paro/Bangkok group flight. Wilderness Travel will also book this flight for all trip members as part of the “internal airfare”.

This Paro/Bangkok flight typically arrives in Bangkok between 1:00 pm and 5:30 pm, although it is prone to delays and changes, even at the last minute. Because the timing of this flight can change, you should spend the night in Bangkok on Day 12, departing anytime the next day (or later, if you would like to extend your time in Bangkok). Overnights in Bangkok are on your own (at additional cost).

INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL

You are responsible for making your own arrangements for flights to and from Bangkok, Thailand.

Depending on your routing, it may be necessary to depart from the US one or possibly two days prior to Day 1 of the trip itinerary. The name on your airline ticket must match the name on your passport exactly, and your passport must be valid for at least six months after your date of return to the US.

There are many online consolidators for booking travel, but for more personal help arranging air transport, you can contact Exito Travel at 1-800-655-4053 in the US or 1-800-670-2605 in Canada. They are very adept at putting flight itineraries together, to even the most far-flung places. More information can be found on Exito's website at www.exitotravel.com.

Please do not purchase your tickets until you are confirmed on the trip. Once tickets are purchased, please forward a copy of your email flight confirmation from the airline. It is your responsibility to ensure your flight times coordinate with the arrival and departure logistics for this trip.

INTERNAL FLIGHTS

Wilderness Travel will book your round-trip Bangkok/Paro/Bangkok flights as part of the “internal airfare,” and will send you an eTicket for these flights prior to departure. Please note that many flights to/from Bhutan will stop in India or another Asian country en route to your final destination. You will not have to change planes, but other passengers might disembark and/or embark the aircraft.

Wilderness Travel will also book your Bumthang/Paro flight on Day 10 of the trip. The eTicket for this flight will be handled by your Trip Leader and given to you in-country.

Please note that Bhutan flights can be subject to last minute changes due to the government/military’s priority usage of aircraft, adverse weather conditions, booking problems, and other factors beyond our control. We ask that you be flexible if unexpected delays occur.

EXTRA HOTEL NIGHTS IN BANGKOK

You are responsible for making your own hotel reservations in Bangkok. To request hotel reservations, we recommend you contact the hotels directly. It is best to check current rates and availability online. We recommend the following hotels:

Hotel Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (at the airport)

www.novotel.com

The Peninsula Bangkok (downtown)

www.peninsula.com/bangkok

Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel (downtown)

www.royalorchidsheraton.com

Riva Surya Bangkok Hotel (downtown)

www.nexthotels.com/hotel/riva-surya-bangkok

Accommodations



HOTELS IN THIMPHU

Thimphu, Bhutan, Days 1 to 2 (2 nights)

In Thimphu we stay at one of the following properties based on availability:

LE MÉRIDIEH HOTEL

Opened in 2014, Le Meridien's brilliant white building capped with a vibrant red roof and orange-trimmed windows reveals a modern twist on traditional Bhutanese architecture. Guestrooms are spacious and have wonderful views of Thimphu's tranquil mountains nearby, and the hotel is within a five-minute walk of the famous Memorial Chorten and close to small shops and markets—the perfect location to immerse yourself in the timeless environment. Le Meridien also has an indoor pool to unwind after an exploratory day in the “Land of the Thunder Dragon.”

YARKAY HOTEL

The Yarkay Hotel, a member of the Dusit Hotels and Resorts chain, has a prime central location—perfect for taking an evening walk or shopping after the day's excursion. Guestrooms are modern and comfortable and offer views of the surrounding hills. The lobby has wonderful artwork referencing the beloved national folktale of the Four Friends (elephant, rabbit, monkey, and bird). Facilities include a spa, gym, heated indoor pool, and onsite restaurant, and the staff is courteous and cheerful.



HOTELS IN THE PUNAKHA VALLEY

Punakha Valley, Bhutan, Days 3 to 4 (2 nights)

In Punakha we stay at one of the following properties based on availability:

DRAGON'S NEST HOTEL

The Dragon's Nest Resort is a rustic country hotel nestled in the Punakha Valley on the banks of the Puna Tsang Chu River. Guestrooms are simple, but clean and comfortable, with en suite bathrooms and hot-water showers, and the hotel property is well maintained. All 18 of the guestrooms have views overlooking the river and the valley. Meals are served buffet-style in the separate central dining room.

HOTEL SONAMGANG

Overlooking the town of Punakha and the Puna Tsang Chu River, Hotel Sonamgang has simple, pleasant rooms. There is a small outdoor swimming pool, and a terrace where you can enjoy the expansive views, as well as a comfortable indoor lounge area.



YUE LOKI GUEST HOUSE

Phobjikha, Bhutan, Day 5 (1 night)

This small, rustic country lodge with its classic Bhutanese architecture is set in a wonderfully remote location in one of Bhutan's most pristine valleys. The rooms are simple, clean, and comfortable, with private bathrooms and showers and a wood burning stove in each room. The staff can prepare a hot-water bottle to warm up your bed at night, a pleasant treat during Bhutan's chilly evenings.



HOTELS IN TRONGSA

Trongsa, Bhutan, Day 6 (1 night)

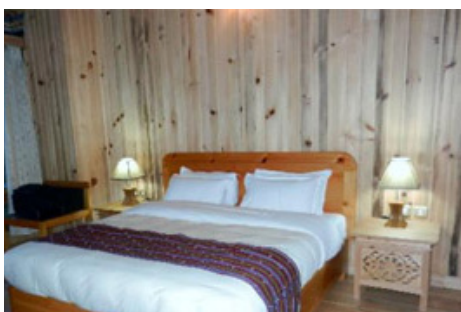
In Trongsa, we stay at one of the following properties:

YANGKHIL RESORT

After a long day of travel through the countryside, the Yangkhil Resort is a welcoming oasis. Built in traditional Bhutanese style, this hillside hotel, with its breathtaking views of the mountains and imposing Trongsa Dzong, features spacious chalet-style rooms that are simple but comfortable, modern, and clean. A dining terrace overlooks a tranquil flower-filled garden with fish ponds, a stream, and water-driven prayer wheel. The staff is friendly and helpful.

NORBU LINGKHA RESORT

The Norbu Lingka Resort features traditional Bhutanese architecture in a serene setting, with views of the valley and the Black Mountains. It's ideally situated for visiting some of the local cultural monuments, including Trongsa Dong. Take some time to relax in the bar/lounge or indulge in a massage at the spa.



HOTELS IN BUMTHANG

Bumthang, Bhutan, Days 7 to 9 (3 nights)

In Bumthang, we stay at one of the following properties:

GONGKHAR LODGE

This small family-run hotel is located just outside Jakar and enjoys a superb location with 360-degree views of the valley. The large cottage-style rooms are warmed by a wood stove and offer a comfortable ambiance. Locally made jam, honey, and cheese are some of the breakfast buffet highlights. The staff is attentive and helpful.

VALLEY RESORT

This guest house offers a lot of cozy Bhutanese charm. There are 18 spacious guest rooms with comfortable queen-size beds and large windows framing beautiful views of the valley. The owner and his staff are warm and welcoming.

Accommodations (cont'd)



HOTELS IN PARO

Paro, Bhutan, Days 10 to 11 (2 nights)

In Paro we stay at one of the following properties based on availability:

ZHIWA LING HOTEL

Located on 10 acres in a serene setting in the green Paro Valley, the deluxe Zhiwa Ling is a wonderful example of traditional Bhutanese architecture, every bit of it hand-carved in Bhutan by local craftsmen. The guest rooms are airy and large, with balconies opening onto views of world-famous Taktsang Monastery. At the hotel's Menlha Spa, enjoy a sauna or a Bhutanese-style massage, perfect after a long day's hike, while the tea room offers local safflower and cinnamon herb teas. The hotel has two restaurants, plus the Mad Monk bar, a great spot for winding down. The Zhiwa Ling has appeared on Conde Nast Traveler's annual "Gold List."

LE MERIDIEN

Set along the riverfront, this hotel offers a little bit of luxury in the heart of Paro, while still being conveniently located near the Paro Airport, Bhutan's only international airport. Guestrooms are clean and modern with beautiful wall decorations, wood floors, marble bathrooms, and serene views of the mountains and Paro River. During your free time, relax on the outdoor terrace or enjoy a walk to the river.

These are our signature accommodations for this trip. Although it is highly unlikely, we may make substitutions when necessary. To see more photos and descriptions, please visit our *Hiker's Journey to Bhutan* webpage and click on "Accommodations."

Trip Leaders

Wilderness Travel Trip Leaders have a passion and a joy for creating an unforgettable journey. We are extremely proud of them and the incredible travel experiences they make possible. For more information, including client comments about them and which specific trips they will be leading, please visit our webpage and click on “Trip Leaders”: <https://www.wildernesstravel.com/trip/bhutan-hiking-festival-tour/>



KIPCHU DORJI

Kipchu Dorji, whose name translates to “Calm Water Thunderbolt,” was born in the village of Katsho in Bhutan’s little-visited Haa Valley. Kipchu attended Dr. Graham’s School in Kalimpong, India, and completed his professional training back in Bhutan, with studies in Buddhist iconography, culture, history, and botany. When Bhutan’s doors were first opened to outsiders in the late 70s, Kipchu was at the frontier as one of the first official guides to his country. In addition to his decades of experience as a Trip Leader, Kipchu has also traveled to England and Nepal for advanced trek leadership training. He has led countless trips throughout Bhutan since 1985, certainly earning the rank of one of our most experienced—and beloved!—Trip Leaders.



KINLEY GYELTSHEN

Kinley Gyeltshen hails from Bhutan’s green and rugged southwest, where traditional farming is still the center of daily life. When the country first opened its doors to the outside world, Kinley was among the early guides selected and formally trained by the government of Bhutan to welcome foreigners in. After university studies in India, he became a professional guide in 1985, completing extensive training in Buddhist iconography, culture, history, and botany. When not on the trail, Kinley channels his energy into biking, and also likes to relax in the company of his large close-knit family. He is appreciated by WT trip members for his encyclopedic knowledge of all things Bhutanese as well as his jovial nature. Kinley is currently the Chairman of the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO), an NGO that promotes the Bhutanese tourism and travel industry with the highest standards of service, ethics, and professionalism.

Trip Details

WHAT THE TRIP IS LIKE

This trip is Level 3+, according to our trip rating system. There are hikes on 7 days, ranging in length from 2 to 6 hours. The hikes are moderate and suitable for people in good shape who enjoy mountain hiking. Although you carry only a daypack, there are some steep ascents and descents, and the hikes are at moderate altitude, which can make them feel strenuous.

Please note that travel times vary depending upon local conditions, and the itinerary may change while you are in Bhutan due to government regulations and local climate conditions.

GETTING IN SHAPE

For your own enjoyment, we recommend you make a special effort to be in good physical condition for the journey by hiking, running, swimming, bicycling, or engaging in other forms of aerobic exercise well beyond your normal routine. Walking up and down flights of stairs is also an effective way to train for the steep ascents and descents in the Himalaya. Weekend hikes that involve long sections of uphill and downhill walking are great for conditioning your legs.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND FOOD

Our accommodations in Bhutan range from rustic to very comfortable. The hotels in Paro and Thimphu offer a great deal of comfort, while the lodges in Punakha, the Phobjikha Valley, and Bumthang are rustic, but well-situated and cozy. Most rooms are twin-bedded. At most guesthouses, simple buffets are provided at lunch and dinner. Bhutan's cuisine is generally based on basic rice with stir-fry and stew options.

WEATHER

Bhutan is known to have the most unpredictable weather in the Himalaya, so it is best to be prepared for a range of conditions. During spring (mid-March to early June) in the Thimphu and Paro regions, daytime temperatures range from 65°F to 85°F but colder spells are not unusual. The autumn season arrives in September and lasts until mid-November. At this time, skies tend to be clearer and temperatures lower, sometimes falling to below freezing at night. At altitudes of 8,000 to 10,000 feet (as in Bumthang), daytime temperatures range in the 50s and 60s with nights dropping to the 40s. Clouds often form in the afternoons, disappearing at night to reveal brilliantly starry skies. At altitudes above 10,000 feet, daytime temperatures can be in the 60s but as low as the 30s and 40s if it is windy. Evening temperatures at these higher altitudes often drop to around 15°F and sometimes lower. Rain and snow are not uncommon at any time of year making waterproof rain gear a necessity for Bhutan.

BEING A CONSIDERATE TRAVELER

Please show respect for the cultures we are visiting by observing local customs concerning appropriate dress, particularly in sacred places. Your Trip Leader is always available to answer any questions that you may have regarding this. If it is necessary to use a cell phone during the trip, please do so privately. Smoking is rarely an issue these days, but if you do smoke, please do so only away from the group.

Average Daily Max/Min °F												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Thimphu	45/19	46/23	52/30	57/37	61/43	64/48	64/50	64/50	63/46	59/37	52/28	48/21
Punakha	61/40	67/42	70/49	76/53	81/59	88/67	90/71	89/68	86/69	82/66	72/55	59/46
Bumthang	35/1	34/5	39/14	44/22	50/30	54/38	55/41	55/40	53/36	47/23	42/12	38/4
Rainfall - Inches												
Thimphu	0.3	0.4	1.3	3.1	7.1	16.0	20.1	14.8	9.3	3.1	0.4	0.2
Punakha	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.9	1.0	1.6	3.0	2.8	1.4	0.6	0.2	0.1
Bumthang	0.3	0.6	1.0	1.3	1.2	2.1	3.9	4.2	2.4	0.9	0.2	0.1

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRIP

Adventure travel often involves exotic destinations, unusual levels of physical exertion, or activities you may not have participated in previously. We work hard to help you choose the right trip for you, paying attention to your individual interests, abilities, and needs. If you have questions about the level of comfort or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please call Wilderness Travel at 1-800-368-2794 and ask for the Asia Manager or email us at asia@wildernesstravel.com.

REFERENCES

We'd be happy to put you in touch with a past client that has traveled with us on this or a similar trip.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

At www.wildernesstravel.com, you can book your trip online or find out about added departures, last-minute deals, and one-time Limited Edition adventures that aren't listed in our catalog. You can also access our complete library of detailed itineraries filled with enticing photos and videos, read bios of our Trip Leaders, find descriptions of trip accommodations, and check real-time availability of any trips that interest you.

Toucan Club Rewards & Discounts



MEN'S T-SHIRT



WOMEN'S T-SHIRT



PATAGONIA SYNCHILLA FLEECE VEST
PLUS INSULATED CAMELBAK WATER BOTTLE



PATAGONIA R1 PULLOVER

We are very proud to have one of the highest rates of repeat travelers in the business, and have established the Wilderness Travel Toucan Club to reward you for your loyalty. For more information, please visit the Toucan Club page of our website at www.wildernesstravel.com/toucan.

Here's how it works:

YOUR FIRST TRIP

As a first-time traveler, you receive a lightweight Wilderness Travel T-shirt and set of durable WT Luggage Tags. On subsequent trips, we're happy to send you a new WT T-shirt and set of Luggage Tags by request.

YOUR SECOND TRIP

A top quality Wilderness Travel insulated stainless steel water bottle by CamelBak and a cozy Wilderness Travel fleece vest by Patagonia (\$130 value).

YOUR THIRD TRIP

A versatile Wilderness Travel R-1 pullover by Patagonia (\$140 value).

YOUR FOURTH TRIP

Discounts on the cost of your trip begin! You receive a 4% discount on the tour cost.

FIVE AND MORE TRIPS

You receive a 5% discount on the base trip cost. On your sixth trip, you receive a 6% discount, and so on up to your 10th trip. The maximum discount is 10%, with a ceiling of \$500.

Note: Due to special pricing considerations, Toucan Club discounts do not apply to our Private Journeys or Special Events. However, your participation on these trips does count toward your Toucan discount on future departures of Wilderness Travel's regular adventures.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

Toucan Club travel discounts cannot be used in conjunction with any other discount, unless otherwise specified. Discounts are deducted from the base trip cost and shown on the final invoice. The base trip cost is the main land/tier cost and does not include single supplement fees, extensions, internal airfare, or other additional charges. Bonus gifts (T-shirts, luggage tags, vests, water bottles, and pullovers) will be mailed approximately three weeks prior to trip departure. Terms and conditions of Toucan Club bonuses are subject to change or cancellation at the discretion of Wilderness Travel, Inc.

Travel Notes



WILDERNESS TRAVEL HAS BEEN AWARDED:

Best Travel Specialists in the World: *Condé Nast Traveler*, 2024, 4-time winner

World's Best Tour Operators: *Travel + Leisure*, 11-time winner

Best Wildlife, Hiking & Walking Trips: *AFAR Magazine*, 3 years in a row

Best Adventure Travel Companies: *USA Today*

Trip of the Year: *Outside Magazine*, 9-time winner

50 Tours of a Lifetime: *National Geographic Traveler*, 9 years in a row

Best Adventure Travel Companies: *National Geographic Adventure*, 3-time winner

Please be advised that California has established a Travel Consumer Restitution Fund under the California Seller of Travel Law that took effect January 1, 1996. This fund is designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices by discount airfare ticket sellers or air charter operators. Unfortunately, this law does not cover non-California residents and, even in the case of California residents, it does not cover any foreign travel where the foreign "providers of transportation or travel services" are not in compliance with the Sellers of Travel Law (compliance being defined as registered as a Seller of Travel in California and a participant in the Travel Consumer Restitution Fund). Thus none of Wilderness Travel's tours qualify and we are required by law to advise each client that they are not covered by the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires sellers of travel to maintain a trust account or bond. This business has a trust account. California Seller of Travel #100769640

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities and trip routing, rather than an inflexible schedule of events; it is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the terms and conditions as detailed in the General Information section of the Wilderness Travel Catalog.

October 16, 2024 2:42 PM