

# Bhutan – Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon

Tour Code BH

The remote kingdom of Bhutan has a fascinating cultural and architectural heritage plus beautiful mountain scenery. A highlight of any visit to the country is to witness a Tshechu (Festival); a colourful event accompanied by Buddhist chants and masked dances. This tour is timed to coincide with one of the least tourist visited festivals and is set in one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan. The country continues to preserve its cultural integrity and age-old traditions as revealed in this unique and comprehensive tour, which travels through the fascinating western and central regions of the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon



Punakha Tshechu Festival,  
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## ITINERARY

### Day 1 Fly from London to Kathmandu

Flight with Etihad Airlines from Heathrow

### Day 2 Arrive Kathmandu

PM arrival. Personal transfer and overnight at Summit Residency, Kathmandu Airport

### Day 3 Morning flight to Paro, BHUTAN

A spectacular mountain flight on KB 401 this morning at 0955 to Paro from Kathmandu with Druk Air. We visit the National Museum which holds fascinating collection of art, relics, religious thangka paintings and exquisite postage stamps. Later we visit Rinpung Dzong built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the first spiritual and temporal ruler of Bhutan, the Dzong houses the monastic body of Paro, the office of the Dzongda (district administrative head) and Thrimpon (judge) of Paro district. Two nights at a standard hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

### Day 4 In Paro

Today we visit Taktshang Monastery (5hrs hike) known as Tiger's Nest, the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery and hence it is called 'Tiger's Nest'. On the way back into town we visit Drukgyel Dzong built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to commemorate his victory over the Tibetan invaders and Kyichu Lhakhang one of the oldest shrines of the Kingdom dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century (B,L,D)

### Day 5 Drive to Thimpu

We drive the short distance to Thimpu stopping at Chuzom, the confluence of Thimphu and Paro rivers and Tschogang Lhakhang, "the temple of the excellent horse", built in 15th century. The capital town of Bhutan and the centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimphu is a unique city with unusual mixture of modern development alongside ancient traditions. We visit the National Library, which holds a vast collection of ancient Buddhist texts and manuscripts, some dating back several hundred years and the Textile and Folk Heritage Museum - these museums, both of which opened in 2001, provide fascinating insights into Bhutanese material culture and way of life. Later we visit the National Memorial Chorten. The building of this landmark was envisaged by the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, as a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it is both a memorial to the Late King ("the Father of modern Bhutan") and a monument to world peace. The paintings and statues inside the monument provide a deep insight into Buddhist philosophy. Overnight at a standard hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

### Day 6 Thimpu – Trongsa

After an early breakfast we drive (7 hours) to Trongsa via Dochula pass (3,050m) arriving at Wangduephodrang town in time for lunch. We continue to Trongsa across Pelela pass (3,300 m), the traditional boundary between east and west. The pass is marked by a large prayer flag and the ground is covered with high altitude dwarf bamboo. Stop enroute at Chendbji Chorten, which was built in 18th century by a Lama named Shida, it is Nepalese in style with eyes painted at four cardinal points. On arrival in Trongsa we check in to our hotel. Overnight standard hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

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### Day 7 Trongsa – Bumthang

We visit Trongsa Dzong, built in 1648 it was the seat of power over central and eastern Bhutan and Ta Dzong, recently opened fort in Trongsa. The Ta Dzong, a cylindrical stone structure rising five stories, was built in 1652 by Chogyal Minjur Tempa, Later we drive (2.5 hours) to Bumthang crossing Yutong-la pass (3,400m/ 11,155 ft). The road winds steeply up to the pass from Trongsa; then runs down through coniferous forest into a wide, open cultivated valley known as the Chumey valley. En-route we stop at Chumey, a wide fertile valley where wheat, barley, potatoes and buckwheat are cultivated. It is particularly know for its famous wool weaving called "Bumthang Yathra". On arrival in Bumthang we check in to our hotel. Two nights *Yu-Gharling Resort* with dinner (B,L,D)

### Day 8 Attend Nalakhar Tshechu Festival

Dancers wear spectacular costumes made of yellow silk or rich brocade, often decorated with ornaments of carved bone. For certain dances, they wear masks which may represent animals, fearsome deities, skulls or just simple human beings. The Thongdroel unveiled during this festival is of enormous significance. Composed entirely of applique on more than 6,000 metres of silk brocade, it took 51 artists, two years to complete (B,L,D)

### Day 9 In Bumthang

Bumthang is the general name given to combination of four valleys – Chumey, Choekhor, Tang and Ura with altitude varying from 2,600m to 4,000m. It is home to many of prominent Buddhist temples and monasteries. This morning we visit Kurje Lhakhang, where the saint Padmasambhava subdued a local demon and left his body imprint on a rock., the Jambey Lhakhang (7th century temple), Tamshing Lhakhang (housing some of the oldest wall paintings in Bhutan) and Jakar Dzong (administrative centre of the region). This afternoon we have short hike to Lhodrak Kharchhu Monastery founded by Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche in 1984 to preserve Tibetan culture (B,L,D)

### Day 10 Bumthang – Punakha

Today we drive (7 hours) to Punakha across Yutong-la pass (3,400m/ 11,155 ft) & Pelela pass (3,300 m). These Mountain passes offer spectacular views over the high peaks of the eastern Himalayas on a clear day. On arrival at Punakha we check-in to our hotel and spend the rest of the day in leisure or exploring Punakha village located right on the bank of river. Three nights in *Puna Tsangchhu Cottage* with dinner (B,L,D)

### Day 11 In Punakha

After breakfast we hike to Khamsum Yuelay Namgyal Choeten, a moderate half hour hike through the rice paddies. Next we visit Punakha Dzong, a fortress built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1637. Punakha served as the capital of Bhutan until 1955 and it still is the winter residence of the Central Monk Body. Later enjoy a picnic lunch on the banks of the Punak Chhu in the stunning dzong which straddles the confluence of the Mo Chhu (Mother River) and Pho Chhu (Father River). After lunch we drive to the village of Talo for a walk in the beautiful and quiet grounds of the village temple and visit the home village of the Kingdom's four Queens (B,L,D)

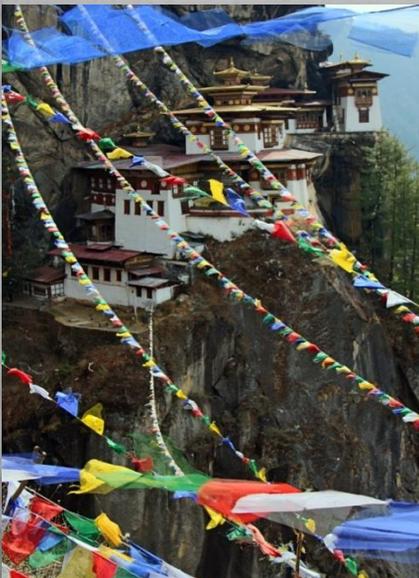
### Day 12 Punakha – Paro

A leisurely morning before our drive (4 hours) via the Dochula Pass (3100m). The pass is marked by a large massive choeten, 108 smaller choetens (Druk Wangyel Choetens) and prayer flags. The pass offers the most spectacular view over the high peaks of the eastern Himalayas. We arrive into Paro and spend the rest of the day at leisure. Overnight in *Tashi Namgay Resort* with dinner (B,L,D)

### Day 13 Paro – Kathmandu

Early morning transfer to the airport for our flight KB-400 to Kathmandu at 0730 (B)

**Cost £2495.00** per person in a twin room (excluding international flights) Single supplement charge £300.00



#### Price includes –

- ▶ Tour accompanied from London by *Patrick Syder FRGS*
- ▶ Bhutanese guide for the duration of the tour
- ▶ All transportation by a/c bus
- ▶ Full sightseeing programme including entrance fees
- ▶ Comfortable three star standard category tourist hotels.
- ▶ All meals in hotel or local restaurants
- ▶ Airport transfers
- ▶ Bottled water daily
- ▶ Porter, hotel and restaurant staff gratuities
- ▶ Royalty and Tourism Development Fund Taxes

#### **Please note this tour involves some long drives and high altitudes**

PLEASE NOTE – personal travel insurance, visa fees, alcoholic drinks, guide and driver gratuities, international flights to Paro via Kathmandu and transit hotel costs in Kathmandu are not included in the land tour cost (flights from £895.00 through Flight Centre UK), (Included meals denoted by B Breakfast, L Lunch, D Dinner)