



Bhutan

The Hidden Kingdom Tour

10 days, 9 nights



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The Hidden Kingdom Tour

Come along with us on a journey into the Hidden Kingdom of Bhutan, and immerse yourself in the incredible sites including the Memorial Chorten and the ancient Tango Monastery. Your journey will take you past farms and hills decorated with prayer flags, over high mountain passes and through small villages. Along the way you may be able to make offerings, or worship in one of the many temples or monasteries – or alternatively, partake in the national sport of archery.

Along the journey, we'll provide comfortable accommodations, time for relaxation and reflection and opportunities to enjoy local entertainment and customs. Let your journey begin today.

Itinerary

DAY 01

Arrive in Paro

DAY 02

Explore Jampa, Kurjey Lhakhang, and Jakar Dzong

DAY 03

Explore Tang Ugyen Choeling Palace, Mebartsho Lake

DAY 04

Visit Trongsa Dzong and Phobjikha Valley

DAY 05

Visit the Famed Fortress Punakha Dzong

DAY 06

Drive Dochu La Pass, Tour Ancient Hongtsho Village

DAY 07

Explore Thimphu's Past and Present

DAY 08

Visit Tango Monastery and Travel to Paro

DAY 09

Climb to Iconic "Tiger's Nest" Monastery

DAY 10

Depart Bhutan

DAY 01

Arrive in Paro

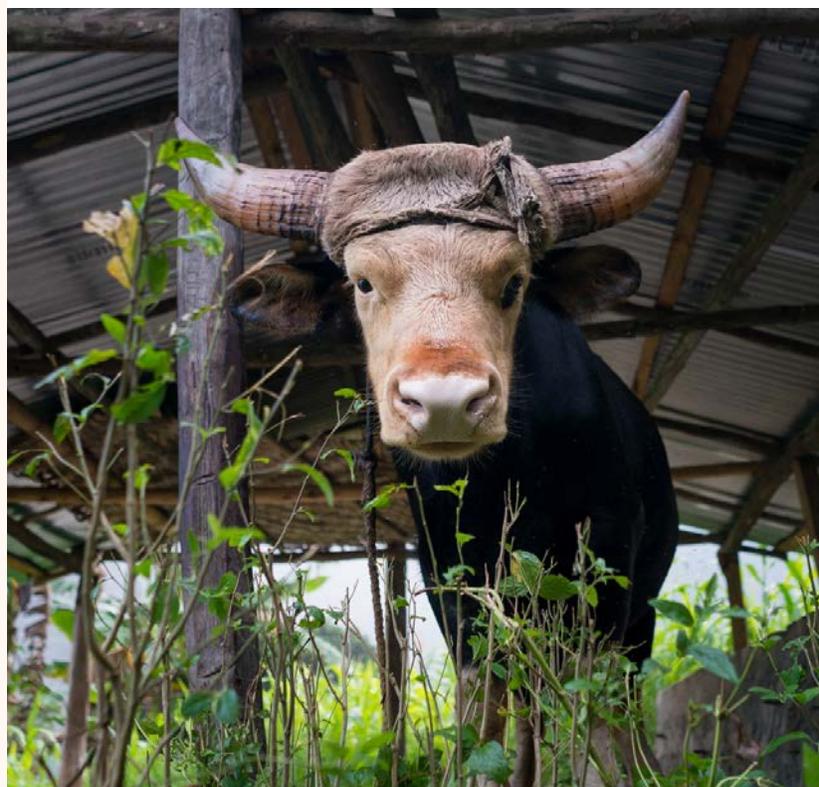
You'll land in Bhutan with glimpses of the natural beauty of Paro Valley. In clear weather, you'll be able to see the world's highest peaks give way to the lush green valley. Stepping out of the plane, you'll feel the cool, fresh air of Bhutan — an introduction befitting the beauty of the Kingdom. Gray Langur Tours will take care of all airport formalities while you enjoy the comfort of the VIP airport lounge services. You will then be transferred to your accommodations.

Once you're settled in, we will start our afternoon with a visit to one of the holiest temples in Bhutan, Duntse Lhakhang. Duntse Lhakhang was built in 1421 by the famous Tibetan Lama, Thangton Gyelpo (1385-1464), who was also known as Chagzampa, (Builder of Iron Bridges) and Drubthob (The Realized One). This temple has three floors representing Hell, Earth, and Heaven, and the paintings inside are considered to be some of the most significant in Bhutan.

Afterwards, we'll travel even further back into history at Kyichu Lhakhang, a symbolic temple built by King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet in 659 AD. This Lhakhang (temple) is one of the most sacred monasteries in Bhutan. It's believed to be holding down the left foot of a demon whose body is so large that it covers Bhutan and most of Eastern Tibet. It also contains a five-meter-high statue of Guru Rinpoche and another of Tara, who represents one of the wives of King Songtsen Gampo.

If time permits, you can explore the town of Paro, either accompanied or on your own. Your personal guide and chauffeur will be available whenever you need assistance.

In the evening, you'll be treated to a sumptuous welcome dinner, possibly accompanied by a cultural show featuring some of the liveliest festive mask dances of the Kingdom of Bhutan that originated centuries ago.



DAY 02

Explore Jampa, Kurjey Lhakhang, and Jakar Dzong

After an early breakfast, transportation will be provided to Paro International Airport for your short flight to Bumthang in central Bhutan. Upon arriving in Bumthang, your original personal guide will collect you at the airport and drive you to your hotel.

After a brief rest, we'll visit the ancient temple of Jampa (Maitreya). Jampa is one of the 108 temples throughout Tibet built by Gampo and the Himalayas constructed to overcome a giant demon. Jampa Lhakhang was placed on the demon's left knee, and the central figure in the Lhakhang is Jampa, the Buddha of the Future. From Jampa, we'll walk about 15 minutes to the Kurjey Lhakhang complex. The Kurjey site is one of the most sacred in Bhutan as Guru Rinpoche meditated here and left an imprint of his body on a rock. Both of these temples date back to the origin of Buddhism in Bhutan.

We return to our hotel for lunch before exploring Jakar Dzong, or the "Castle of the White Bird." Constructed in 1549, by the Tibetan Lam Nagi Wangchuk, the dzong played an important role as the fortress for the defense of Bhutan's eastern districts. It also became the seat of the first King of Bhutan. A special feature of the dzong is the approximately 160-foot high central tower, which, along with its elegance and modest size, distinguishes this dzong from most others in Bhutan. It is the administrative seat of the district and, since 1998, a Drukpa monastic community.

The rest of your afternoon is yours to either explore the small township of Jakar on your own, take a leisurely stroll through the Bumthang Valley, or relax at the hotel.

DAY 03

Explore Tang Ugyen Choeling Palace, Mebartsho Lake

Today, we'll journey to the Tang Valley to visit the 16th-century palace Tang Ugyen Choeling, originally built by Deb Tsokye Dorji, a descendant of Dorji Lingpa. We will reach Ugyen Choeling after a one-hour hike over a suspension footbridge, through farm fields and small villages. The palace complex has been turned into an eco-museum to preserve its legacy and provide a place for religious studies, research, and solitude, and it also features an excellent overview of traditional rural life in Bhutan.

We continue on to Mebartsho, or "The Flaming Lake." Mebartsho is located in a narrow gorge in Tang



Valley, a short drive from Jakar. It's one of the great pilgrimage sites of Bhutan. This is where Pema Lingpa found treasures hidden by Guru Rinpoche and thus became a *terton*, or a "discoverer of religious treasures." The lake is named for an incident involving Pema Lingpa in the late 1400s. The first Terma that Pema Lingpa discovered here contained instructions to return to the lake to collect more treasures. When the local governor accused Pema Lingpa of trickery, he declared that if he were the real revealer of treasures, he could dive into the lake with a lamp, and would return with a lamp still lit. If he were a devil, he would perish. Pema Lingpa took a plunge in the lake and was gone long enough to satisfy the skeptics; but he soon emerged clutching a statue and a box of treasures, with the lamp still burning.

After lunch, we continue with a visit to Tamshing Lhakhang, founded in 1501 by Terton Pema Lingpa. It contains paintings that illuminate the region's rich history of art. On the lower floor is a 55lb coat of chain mail attributed to Pema Lingpa, who had knowledge of metallurgy. (Tradition says that if a person walks three times around the sanctuary wearing this coat of chain mail, his or her sins will be wiped away.) A short distance below Tamshing Lhakhang is a small rural-looking temple called Konchogsum Lhakhang, dating back to the 6th or 7th century and renovated in 1995. The small statues of the three Buddhas (past, present, and future) in the sanctuary are said to have flown here straight from Khaine Lhakhang in Kurtoe in eastern Bhutan. Hence, the name of this Lhakhang is Konchogsum — konchog (divine being) and sum (three).

After a day of exploring, we'll retire back to our hotel for dinner and relaxation.



DAY 04

Visit Trongsa Dzong and Phobjikha Valley

After breakfast, we'll drive to Trongsa where we'll begin exploring at the Trongsa Ta Dzong Museum, inaugurated in 2008 by His Majesty the 5th King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck. The museum is dedicated to the monarchs of the Kingdom. It is situated strategically above the Trongsa Dzong. Built in 1652, the Ta Dzong served for centuries as the official watchtower.

Next, we'll continue on to visit Trongsa Dzong, the most impressive Dzong in the Kingdom. Trongsa Penlop (Governor) Chhogyel Mingyur Tempa built the Dzong in 1644. Trongsa Dzong is the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family. The first two hereditary kings ruled from this Dzong, and it's still a tradition that the crown prince first serves as Trongsa Penlop before ascending to the throne.

We'll enjoy a local, traditional picnic lunch en route to one of Bhutan's few glacial valleys and most important wildlife reserves. Phobjikha Valley, a

three-hour drive from Trongsa, is one of two chosen homes of black-necked cranes from November to March, which migrate from the Tibetan plateau.

After exploring the natural wonders of the Phobjikha Valley, we'll return to our hotel for an evening of rest and relaxation.

DAY 05

Visit the Famed Fortress Punakha Dzong

After breakfast, we'll stop at the 17th century Gangtey Goemba before departing for Punakha, the ancient capital of Bhutan.

In Punakha, we'll visit the famed fortress Punakha Dzong built in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the unifier of Bhutan. The Shabdrung died in 1651 while he was in meditation at Punakha Dzong, and his body is preserved in one of the Dzong's temples. Punakha Dzong is the winter headquarters of the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan. The Dzong is a breathtaking example of traditional Bhutanese architecture, featuring four intricately embossed entrance pillars crafted from cypress and decorated in gold and silver.

After exploring the town's history and traditions, we'll return to our hotel for lunch and a relaxing afternoon.

DAY 06

Drive Dochu La Pass, Tour Ancient Hongtsho Village

We'll start the day with a half-hour walk through idyllic rural farming area. This walk will lead us to a chorten (dedicated monument) that is renowned for its beautiful paintings and complex iconography. Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten is perched high on a hill on the opposite bank of the Mo Chhu, or "Female River," and was commissioned by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck to protect the country.



We'll continue our drive to Thimphu, climbing the 10,000 feet above sea level to Dochu La Pass. You'll know you've arrived at the pass when you see its calming array of prayer flags and 108 chortens. On a clear day, the pass offers a panoramic view of the Bhutan Himalayas. This is a great chance to reflect on your journey through Bhutan so far, and the views will be fittingly serene and vast. Here, take a breath.

Two miles down the hill, we arrive at the ancient Hongtsho Village, set back off the road and close to

nearby (and expansive) Hongtsho Lhakhang. We'll visit the Lhakhang to offer prayers and experience local religious rituals in action.

Continuing downhill, we'll visit Semtokha Dzong. Semtokha, or "The Palace of Profound Tantric Teachings," was the first Dzong to be built by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. It was consecrated in 1631. In 1961, the Third King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, turned the dzong into a center for traditional studies for lay students training to be teachers of Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan. Today the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS) has more than 400 students.

In the evening before dinner at the hotel, you're free to stroll through the streets of Thimphu and explore the city center.

DAY 07

Explore Thimphu's Past and Present

Today, we'll explore some of the many sites around Thimphu. These include the Memorial Chorten, built in 1974 in memory of the Third King of Bhutan His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who died in 1972. We'll also visit Changangkha Lhakhang, one of the oldest temples in Thimphu Valley; the National Library featuring an extensive collection of Buddhist literature mostly in block-printed format, with some works several hundred years old; the School of Traditional Arts; and the Folk Heritage Museum.

In the late afternoon, we'll visit Tashichoedzong, "The Fortress of the Glorious Religion." The expansive dzong houses some national ministries, His Majesty's Secretariat, and the Central Monastic Body.

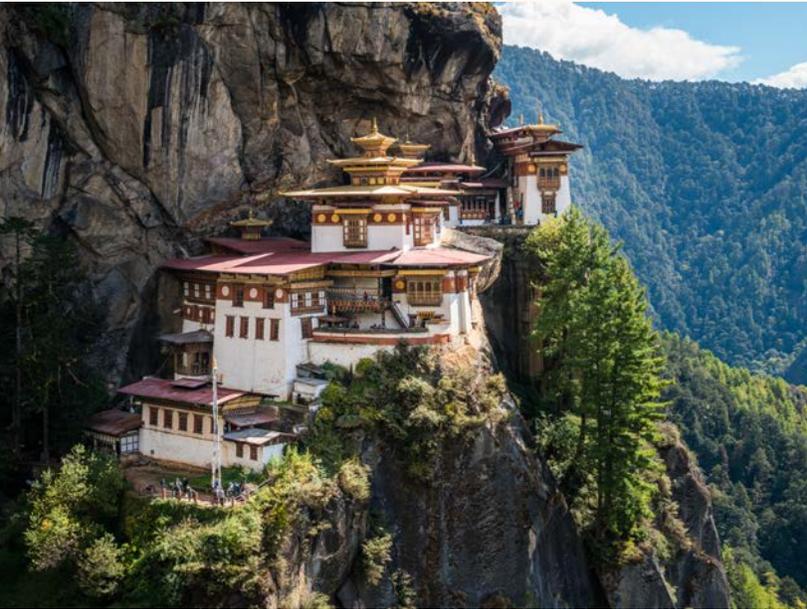
DAY 08

Visit Tango Monastery and Travel to Paro

After an early breakfast, we'll take the short drive north toward Tango Monastery. The trail to Tango Monastery is an hour's climb of roughly 900 feet. Built into the mountainside by a 12th century Tibetan saint, Tango Monastery is now a Buddhist University and the residence of that saint's young seventh reincarnation. Here, philosophy and scholarship are king: this is where His Eminence the ninth Khamtrul Rinpoche completed his studies in Master of Buddhist Philosophy in 2009; His Eminence Thuksey Rinpoche is in his final year pursuing his Master of Buddhist Philosophy.

We will return to Thimphu for lunch. Spend some time taking in the sights on your own or shopping for souvenirs. Afterwards, we'll drive one hour to Paro and check into our hotel for a night of rest.





DAY 09

Climb to Iconic “Tiger’s Nest” Monastery

In the morning, we'll drive to the foothill of the iconic Taktsang, or “Tiger's Nest” Monastery. The 8th century Buddhist Master Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site of the monastery on the back of a tigress. He then meditated in a nearby cave for three months and converted the Paro Valley to Buddhism.

At this point in the journey, you'll have the option to make the climb up to the magnificent monastery, which dramatically perched on the side of a cliff more than 2,900 feet above the floor of the Paro Valley. You can choose to hike the trail or ride up on horseback. It takes approximately 90 minutes to

complete the uphill hike to the Taktsang cafeteria, where you'll have a chance to catch your breath and take in the amazing view of the iconic Taktsang Monastery. From here, it's about another hour to a lookout point beside the monastery. Please note that we don't recommend riding on horseback down the mountain.

Afterwards, you'll return to your hotel for lunch and an afternoon of leisure. If you wish, you can visit Paro Town on your own or simply remain at the resort to relax, or enjoy the wellness and spa facilities for your last evening in Bhutan.

DAY 10

Depart Bhutan

After an early breakfast, you will be transferred to Paro International Airport for your flight to your onward destination.

A Unique and Enriching Adventure Awaits...

This sample itinerary is an example of the kinds of accommodations, activities, and experiences we can customize for you. Let us help you plan your perfect trip to the Land of the Thunder Dragon.

Just drop us an email at tours@graylangur.com, or call (646) 905-0479.