



**Bhutan**

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# Himalayan Explorer Tour

**8 days, 7 nights**



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# Himalayan Explorer Tour

Let's take an explorer's journey with this seven-day tour featuring age-old temples, imposing Dzongs, and gold roofed monasteries. On the Himalayan Explorer Tour, we'll discover traditional architecture and attractions of the Paro Valley, including the ancient Kyichu Temple and Drukgyel Dzong, and take in the sights in Bhutan's capital Thimphu.

Enjoy hiking up 900 meters above the valley floor to the awe-inspiring Taktsang "Tiger's Nest" Monastery. Walk through the Punakha Valley through rice fields and orange plantations to a hillside chorten offering sweeping valley views.

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 Bhutan**

### DAY 02

**Explore Thimphu, the Capital City of Bhutan**

### DAY 03

**Discover Thimphu's "Glorious Religion"**

### DAY 04

**Experience the Famed Fortress of Punakha**

### DAY 05

**Stroll the Punakha Countryside**

### DAY 06

**Experience Ancient Village Life**

### DAY 07

**Climb to Iconic "Tiger's Nest" Monastery**

### DAY 08

**Depart Bhutan**

## DAY 01

# Arrive in Bhutan

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 off 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've settled in, we will start our afternoon with a visit to one of the holiest temples in Bhutan, Dungtse Lhakhang. Dungtse 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 Thimphu, the Capital City of Bhutan

In the morning, we will journey 1.5 hours to Thimphu. Once there, we'll check into our hotel.

We'll spend the day exploring some of Thimphu's many sites. 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 the Thimphu Valley; the National Library featuring an extensive collection of

Buddhist literature mostly in block-printed format (some works dating back several hundred years); the School of Traditional Arts; and the Folk Heritage Museum.

In the evening before dinner, you'll have time to stroll through the streets of Thimphu and explore the city center. Dinner will be served at the hotel.

## DAY 03

# Discover Thimphu's "Glorious Religion"

After an early breakfast, we'll take the short seven-mile drive north toward Tango Monastery. The trail to Tango Monastery is an approximately 900-foot climb and takes about an hour. 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.

After a relaxing lunch and some downtime, we'll take a late afternoon trip to 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 04

# Experience the Famed Fortress of Punakha

In the morning, we will begin our drive to the town of Punakha, climbing 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 (dedicated monuments). On a clear day, the pass offers a panoramic view of the Bhutan Himalayas. This marks the midpoint of your journey through Bhutan, and it will be fittingly serene and vast. Here, take a breath.

When we arrive in Punakha, we'll check into our accommodations and take a break for lunch.

Following lunch, we'll visit the famed fortress of Punakha Dzong, built in 1637 by Shabdrung Nga-



wang Namgyel, the “Unifier of Bhutan.” The Shabdrung died in 1651 while in meditation at Punakha Dzong, and his body is preserved in one of the Dzong’s temples. The Dzong is a breathtaking example of traditional Bhutanese architecture, with four intricately embossed entrance pillars crafted from cypress and decorated in gold and silver. Punakha Dzong is the winter headquarters of the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan.

After exploring the town’s history and traditions, we’ll return to our hotel for some rest and relaxation.

## DAY 05

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# Stroll the Punakha Countryside

This morning, we’ll start the day with a brief walk through an idyllic rural farming area. We’ll arrive at a chorten 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.

A traditional, local lunch will be served on the riverbank, accompanied by a musician showcasing traditional Bhutanese instruments.

After lunch, we’ll take another off-road walk for 20 minutes to pay a visit to Chimi Lhakhang, a temple



built in 1499 by Lama Drukpa Kunley, or “The Divine Madman.” According to legend, the “madman” subdued the demon of Dochu La with his “magic thunderbolt of wisdom.” A wooden effigy of the lama’s thunderbolt is preserved in the Lhakhang. Time permitting, we’ll head even further east to visit Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, a stunning ridge-top fortress founded in 1638 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel.

After our explorations, we’ll settle in for a relaxing evening at our hotel.

## DAY 06

# Experience Ancient Village Life

In the morning, we begin our drive to Thimphu and continue two miles down the hill to the ancient Hongtsho Village. This village is set back off the road and not far from nearby (and expansive) Hongtsho Lhakhang, which was founded in 1525 by the 14th Drukpa hierarch of Tibet, Ngawang Choegyel. We'll visit the Lhakhang to offer prayers and observe local religious rituals.

As we continue downhill, we'll pay a visit to Semtokha Dzong. Semtokha, or "The Palace of Profound Tantric Teachings," was the first Dzong 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 as teachers of Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan. Today the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS) has more than 400 students. After the bustle of the center, we'll take a break for lunch.

Returning to Paro, we'll check into our hotel and settle in for an evening of rest and relaxation before taking on the iconic Tiger's Nest.



## DAY 07

# Climb to Iconic "Tiger's Nest" Monastery

In the morning, we'll drive to the foothill of the iconic Taksang 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 our journey, you'll have the option to make the climb up to the magnificent monastery 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 Taksang cafeteria, where you'll have a chance to catch your breath and take in the amazing view of the iconic Taksang 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.

After indulging in a half-day of cliffside Bhutanese history, we'll return to our hotel for lunch before continuing on to explore the ruins of Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1647 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the great "Unifier of Bhutan." He constructed this dzong to commemorate his victory over the Tibetans in 1644. Drukgyel Dzong was featured on the cover of National Geographic magazine when John Claude White published an article about Bhutan in 1914. In 1951, a fire destroyed most of this glorious and magnificent dzong, but its ruins stand as a fascinating piece of history.

Afterwards, we'll visit the Rinpung Dzong, also known as the "Fortress of a Heap of Jewels." Built in 1646, the dzong stands on a hill high above Paro, and features dazzling architecture and ancient frescos.

In the evening, you're free to explore Paro Town to soak in one last bit of Bhutan before tucking in for the evening.

## DAY 08

# Depart Bhutan

After an early breakfast, you'll be transferred to Paro International Airport for your flight to your return destination.

Time permitting, we will head further east to visit Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, a stunning ridge-top fortress founded in 1638 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel.

## 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](mailto:tours@graylangur.com), or call (646) 905-0479.

