

# The Land of the Thunder Dragon

A photographic journey to Eastern Bhutan

accompanied by adventure travel photographer, Andrew Peacock

**DATES: 13th November to 25th November 2020**



## Bhutan: a photographer's dream

Bhutan is a photographer's dream destination. A largely Buddhist country, steeped in ancient traditions, it has managed to preserve many aspects of a way of life that has changed little in generations. From colourful traditional dress, to imposing dzongs (fortresses), religious rituals, masked dances at Buddhist festivals, dramatic scenery and rural landscapes, Bhutan has it all.

Join us on a journey from Western Bhutan to the mysterious East, little visited by tourists. You will experience many unique photographic opportunities, accompanied by award-winning photographer, Andrew Peacock.

You will also learn about Bhutanese culture, history and lifestyle from our two Bhutanese guides, Norbu and Sonam, who will be with the group throughout the trip. Both are great story-tellers and love to share their knowledge of their homeland with their guests.

This promises to be a very special trip.

We hope you'll join us!

## Your photography guide - Andrew Peacock

Your photography guide will be award-winning Australian photographer, Andrew Peacock. Andrew first began to explore the world around him through a camera lens, while working as a doctor on voluntary assignments in the mountains of Nepal and India. Now he uses his medical and outdoor adventure skills to find ways to explore new corners of the globe and tell those stories through photography. As an adventure travel photographer, he creates images that tell stories of human exploration and adventure in areas of natural beauty and wonder. Andrew's inspiration comes from the activities, landscapes, wildlife and people of the outdoor world.

Andrew's work has appeared in Lonely Planet books, Outside Magazine, Australian Geographic and Virtuoso Traveler, to name just a few. He is a certified photographic instructor with National Geographic/Lindblad Expeditions, working for them in SE Alaska and Iceland and has led photographic tours to Ladakh and Mongolia. For the past six years, Andrew has been a finalist in Australian Geographic's Nature Photographer of the Year Exhibition and he is also a Ted's Cameras, Australia Master Photographer.

Andrew's wonderful adventure travel photography can be found at <http://www.footloosefotography.com/>.

Andrew will be on hand throughout the tour to offer advice on all things photographic and will provide opportunities to review your images at the end of each day.

## Heather McNeice

Your tour leader will be Heather McNeice, author of *'Yak on Track'*, a travel memoir about her trek through Lunana in Bhutan. Heather is the Queensland representative of the Australian Himalayan Foundation, and enthusiastic amateur photographer. She has been organising and leading trekking trips to Bhutan every year since 2010 and this will be her second photography tour in Bhutan with Andrew.

Heather has travelled and trekked extensively in Western and Central Bhutan and has worked closely for the past nine years with our local guide and ground agent on this trip, Tshering Norbu (known as Norbu) owner and operator of Bespoke Bhutan Tours.

Heather will be your main point of contact for all non-photography aspects of the trip and will liaise with the guides and with Andrew in relation to the day-to-day schedule.



## Group size

Minimum of 8 and maximum of 14 guests.

## Photography experience

The tour is aimed at enthusiastic amateur to semi-professional photographers. Partners are welcome too, although please appreciate that the tour has been designed to maximise photographic opportunities and, as such, will involve some early starts and extended periods spent at some locations.

## Camera

To get the most out of the tour, we recommend you bring a DSLR camera and are familiar with the main settings on your camera. You will be able to recharge camera batteries each evening in the hotels but it is always useful to have a spare battery to hand. Bring as many lenses as you'd like. We suggest an ideal combination would include a wide angle lens, especially for landscape shots, a telephoto zoom, as well as your standard lens. A tripod will also be useful.

If you would like to back-up your images during the trip, as well as share them with the group, do bring your laptop.

## Transport

Transport in Bhutan will be in a 22-seater coaster bus, allowing extra space for camera bags and equipment.

## Fitness and elevation

Most sites on the itinerary are accessible by vehicle. There is, however, some walking involved. Although much of this is not too demanding, the exception is the hike to Tiger's Nest which involves a steep climb of approximately 700 metres. Guests who do not wish to continue to the monastery may remain at the café and look-out, just past the half way point.

Most of the route is at elevations of less than 3,000 metres, although we will cross two road passes at close to 4,000 metres.

## Bhutan & Beyond

The trip has been arranged through Bhutan & Beyond, a specialist travel company closely associated with MTA Travel (Mobile Travel Agents) who are a member of the prestigious Virtuoso travel group. Bhutan & Beyond are based in Queensland and specialise in tailor-made trips to Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet and India, for clients worldwide. Directors, James and Nicola Irving, have been travelling regularly to Bhutan for many years and are very knowledgeable about all things Bhutan. Bookings for the trip will be handled by James. James can be reached by telephone on + 61 7 5525 2845, toll free on 1300 367 875 (then press 1#) or by email at [james@bhutan.com.au](mailto:james@bhutan.com.au). Visit the Bhutan & Beyond website at <http://www.bhutan.com.au>



## Itinerary

### **Pre-tour day: 12 November 2020 - arrive Bangkok**

Arrive in Bangkok. We suggest staying overnight at the Novotel at Suvarnabhumi airport, Bangkok, ready for an early departure to Paro, in Western Bhutan, the following morning.

Bhutan & Beyond will hold a group rooming allotment at the Novotel and you may, if you wish, book your room through them.

### **Day 1: 13 November 2020**

#### **Fly to Paro, transfer to Thimphu**

We leave Bangkok for the flight to Paro, arriving mid-morning. On a clear day, there are spectacular views of the snow-capped peaks of the Eastern Himalayas. We will be met at the airport by Norbu and Sonam, our Bhutanese guides, for the drive of just over an hour to Bhutan's capital, Thimphu.

After checking-in to the hotel, we will spend time in downtown Thimphu, including a visit to Thimphu Dzong, the seat of government and home to a large body of monks. As the evening light fades, we'll make our way to the National Memorial Chorten where many pilgrims come to circumambulate the chorten and offer their daily prayers.

*Overnight hotel: Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*



**Day 2: 14 November 2020****Thimphu**

We begin the day with a visit to the giant Buddha Dordenma, one of the largest Buddhist statues in the world, that sits on a hillside overlooking the Thimphu Valley.

We will have lunch in a restaurant in Thimphu, after which you are free to explore the city, perhaps photographing the white-gloved policeman who directs traffic from a decorated sentry box in the central roundabout. Or wander along Norzin Lam, the main street, checking out some of the many souvenir shops. You might want to visit the Post Office, where you can have a picture of yourself made into stamps. Norbu and Sonam will be delighted to point out places of interest or direct you to one of the new coffee shops springing up in Thimphu.

This evening, at dusk, we will drive the short distance to Dechen Phodrang monastery, from where there is a view over the lights of Thimphu.

We will return to the hotel for dinner.

*Overnight hotel: Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*

**Day 3: 15 November 2020****Return to Paro, explore Paro**

If the light is good, we will come back to Dechen Phodrang monastery this morning to watch the sunrise over the valley before returning to the hotel for breakfast.

After breakfast, we will drive back to the Paro Valley and check-in to our hotel beyond Paro town. Depending on our arrival time, we may visit the nearby Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the oldest temples in Bhutan, dating back to the seventh century. Lunch will be in a restaurant in Paro town.

This afternoon, we will visit the dzong, on the banks of the Paro river. You will also have a chance to explore the traditional, wooden-fronted shops along Paro's main street.

If you would like to experience a traditional Bhutanese hot-stone bath, where mineral-rich stones are warmed in a fire and used to heat the water for the bath, we can arrange this for you this evening.

*Overnight hotel: Zhiwa Ling Heritage, Paro Valley*

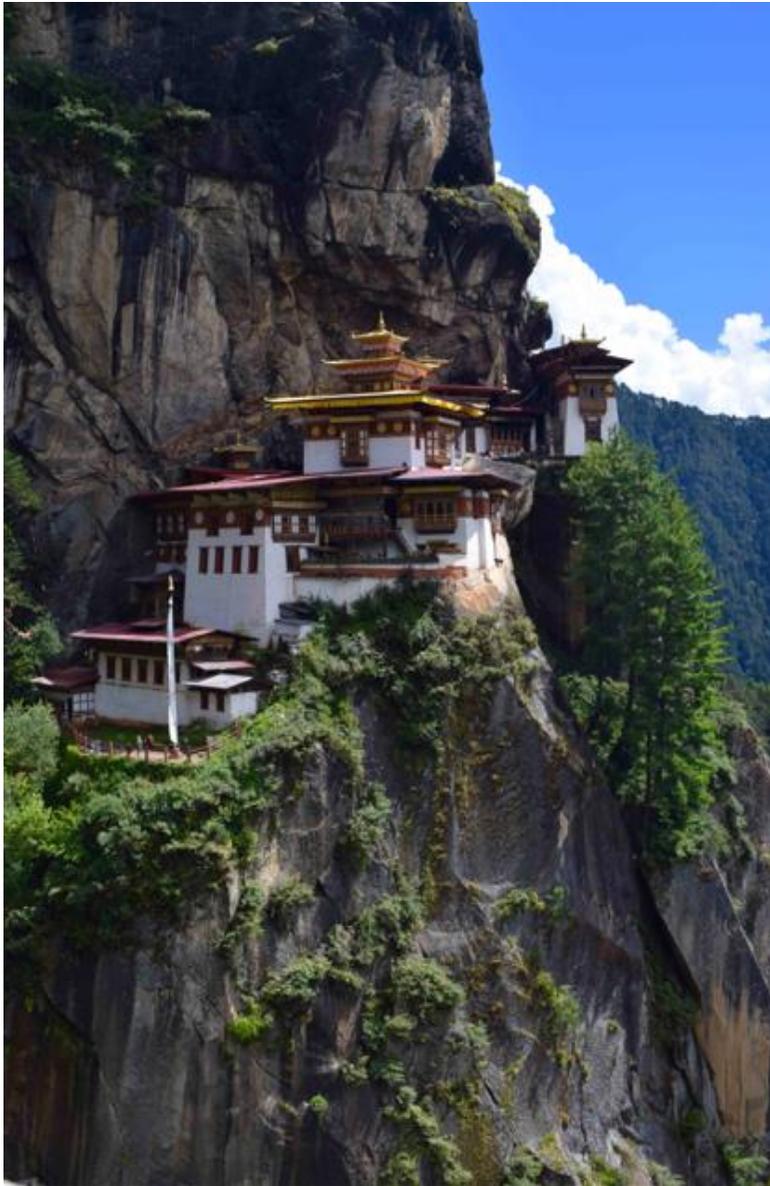
**Day 4: 16 November 2020**  
**Cheli La pass and Dronga Goemba**

Early this morning there is an optional walk of less than an hour to a temple above Paro Dzong, from where there are stunning views along the valley. After breakfast back at the hotel, and, weather permitting, we will drive to the Cheli La pass, the highest motorable road pass in Bhutan, at just under 4,000 metres. On a clear day, there are sweeping views of jagged Himalayan peaks along the horizon. At the pass itself, jumbles of prayer flags, flapping manically in the wind, are a colourful sight.

After returning to the Paro Valley, we will spend the afternoon at Dronga Goemba, a monastery on a hillside overlooking the valley, where we will join the monks for lunch and learn about their daily life in the monastery.

*Overnight hotel: Zhiwa Ling Heritage, Paro Valley*





**Day 5: 17 November 2020**  
**Tiger's Nest monastery**

Today is one of the highlights of the trip with a hike (approximately five/six hours roundtrip) to Taktsang, Tiger's Nest monastery, perched on a cliff face 800m above the Paro valley. According to legend, this is where Guru Rinpoche landed on the back of a flying tigress, bringing Buddhism to Bhutan for the first time. Pilgrims from all over Bhutan make the steep climb up to the monastery. We will visit several ancient temples in the monastery complex and take in the stunning views back along the Paro Valley. Note: no photographs are allowed inside the temples.

For anyone keen to walk another 30 minutes beyond Tiger's Nest, there are a series of monasteries higher on the hillside, from where you can look back down on to the famous temples of Tiger's Nest.

*Overnight hotel: Zhiwa Ling Heritage, Paro Valley*

**Day 6: 18 November 2020**  
**Fly to Bumthang (30 minute flight)**

Today we will take the short internal flight to Bumthang, in central Bhutan, avoiding the two-day drive. It's a great opportunity to catch a glimpse of the snowy peaks along Bhutan's northern border and get a bird's eye view of the main valleys in the west of the country. After landing in Bumthang, we will check-in to the hotel and spend the rest of the day exploring the small main town of Jakar and surroundings. Bumthang is the spiritual heart of Bhutan and we will visit some of the local monasteries, including Jambay Lhakhang, which, like Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro, dates back to the seventh century. Dinner tonight will be at a pizza restaurant in Jakar town.

*Overnight hotel: Kalia Guesthouse, Bumthang Valley or similar*

**Day 7: 19 November 2020**  
**Drive to Yongkola (5-6 hrs)**

We set off after breakfast for the drive east to Mongar, stopping en route in the Ura Valley to take photographs in a medieval village. From there, we continue to the 3750 metre Thrumshingla pass. Our destination is Yongkola, approximately 55 km from Mongar.

*Overnight hotel: Trogon Villa, Yongkola, or similar*

**Day 8: 20 November 2020**  
**Continue to Mongar (1.5hrs)**

We will continue the drive east to the small town of Mongar, the gateway to Eastern Bhutan. We are now in an area that few tourists visit.

We expect there to be lots of activity in Mongar, as the town prepares for the annual tsechu (Buddhist festival) at Mongar Dzong the following day. We will spend some time exploring Mongar town this afternoon.

*Overnight hotel: Wangchuk Hotel, Mongar, or similar*

**Day 9: 21 November 2020**  
**Mongar festival**

Today is the first day of the Mongar tsechu and we plan to spend the day at the festival. This is an amazingly colourful spectacle, with monks performing religious dances, dressed in elaborate costumes of silk and brocade and a fantastic experience from a photography point of view.

The tsechu is an important social event for the people of Mongar and surrounding areas and they will be in attendance in their finest traditional dress.

This evening, if you have a laptop with you, you may want to review your photographs from the festival and identify anything you would like to work on when we return for the second day.

*Overnight hotel: Wangchuck Hotel, Mongar, or similar*

**Day 10: 22 November 2020**  
**Mongar Festival**

Another day at the Mongar festival, photographing the spectators and dancers. We will set off mid-afternoon for the drive to Trashigang, one of the main towns in Eastern Bhutan (approximately three hours' drive).

*Overnight hotel: Druk Deothjung, Trashigang or similar*









**Day 11: 23 November 2020**  
**Trashigang**

Our stay in Trashigang coincides with the annual tsechu. We will spend the day at the Trashigang festival which will already be in full swing.

This will be an opportunity to put into practice any new photographic skills learned at the Mongar festival.

*Overnight hotel: Druk Deothjung Resort, Trashigang or similar*

**Day 12: 24 November 2020**  
**Drive to Samdrup Jongkhar**

It is a 7 hour drive from Trashigang to the border town of Samdrup Jongkhar. We will stop en route when any photographic opportunities arise but plan to visit the National Hand Loom Centre, where you will have an opportunity to see traditional weaving and hand-dyeing and Zangto Pelri Lhakhang, which is an interesting temple. Our final photography stop will be the rural village of Womrong and its small dzong, before arriving at Samdrup Jongkhar.

*Overnight hotel: Hotel Menjong, Samdrup Jongkhar or similar*



**Day 13: 25 November 2020**

**Drive to Guwahati and international departure**

After an early breakfast, we will say goodbye to Bhutan and set off for the three-hour drive to Guwahati in India for an onward flight to Singapore and home.



## Additional photographic opportunities

We plan to incorporate several additional experiences into the itinerary. These include an archery and/or darts game (two of Bhutan's traditional outdoor sports), a visit to a rural school, the opportunity to watch a thankgka artist and/or weaver at work and a visit to a local market. By their nature, the time and location of these events cannot be guaranteed but we will do our best to bring you a number of unique photographic opportunities.





## Cost

All trips within Bhutan and the flights to and from Bhutan are priced in US dollars. With a minimum of ten guests travelling, the cost of this trip, starting in Bangkok, is US \$6,097, based on twin share. A single supplement is available on request. Flights between Singapore and Paro and Guwahati and Singapore cost in the region of US \$1,100 in economy class. The actual fare will be confirmed once the 2020 schedule has been released and flights are available for booking.

We will be in Bhutan in November, one of the two peak times to visit the Eastern Himalayas. Flights and hotels are in high demand and are often booked over a year in advance. Places on this trip will be booked on a first come, first served, basis.

## Payments

Payment may be made to Bhutan & Beyond in US dollars or Australian dollars. To secure your place on the trip, a deposit of AU\$500 is payable within seven days of booking. This will be refundable if we do not have the minimum number for the tour to go ahead. Once the tour is confirmed, a further deposit of AU\$2,500 is payable within seven days and, at this point, both the first and second deposits become non-refundable. A third payment of AU\$1,500 is payable when flights become available for booking. The final balance is due by 18 September 2020. Should you wish to pay your outstanding balance prior to the final payment date, you are welcome to do so. The amount of the final balance will be calculated at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia retail rate of exchange on the day payment is due.

## Hotels

In Paro, we will stay at Zhiwa Ling Heritage, a 4.5 star, National Geographic preferred hotel. <https://www.zhiwaling.com/>

In Thimphu, the sister hotel is the 4 star Zhiwa Ling Ascent <https://www.bhutan.com.au/zhiwa-ling-ascent-thimphu/>

In Bumthang, Yongkola, Mongar and Trashigang we will stay in a Bhutanese 3 star, standard hotel.

In Sandrup Jongkhar there is a limited choice of hotels, most of which are rated 2 star.

All hotels have private bathrooms.

## Included

- Airport transfers in Bhutan
- Return flights Singapore to Paro – priced separately – see above, under Cost
- Experienced English-speaking Bhutanese guides
- Twin share accommodation at Zhiwa Ling, Paro and Thimphu, for five nights
- Twin share accommodation at Bhutanese standard hotels in other locations.
- All meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) in Bhutan
- Photographic guidance throughout the trip
- Group medical kit
- Private transport in Bhutan
- Park entrance fees, road and other permits
- All Bhutanese Government Visa Fees and Royalties
- Sustainable Tourism Fund levy

## Not included

- Outbound flight from departure point to Bangkok and flight home from Singapore (Bhutan & Beyond can book these for you if you wish);
- Airport transfers to local departure airport;
- Overnight accommodation, if required, in Bangkok hotel on the night before departure to Bhutan. We suggest the Novotel which can be booked through Bhutan & Beyond;
- Drinks;
- Expenditure of a personal nature such as souvenirs, phone calls etc;
- Travel insurance – compulsory;
- Tips – see below.



## Travel Insurance

It is a requirement of this trip that you have in place travel insurance. A copy of your certificate of appropriate insurance must be provided to Bhutan & Beyond at the time of paying your deposit or when the tour reaches minimum numbers, whichever is later.

## Tipping

We will be accompanied by experienced English-speaking Bhutanese guides and a driver for the duration of the trip. Tipping the guide and driver is expected. We will let you know how much to allow for tips, before departure.



## Acceptance of Risk

You acknowledge your journey to/from and through this region of South Asia comes with the usual risks of travel and, in some cases, additional risks that are associated with adventure activities and the specific nature of your chosen journey. You accept these risks and the possibility of personal injury, death, property damage or loss may result from your decision to participate in such a journey.

You agree that should you be affected by any sickness, serious injury or other unforeseen circumstances that Bhutan & Beyond, and/or any of our overseas partner operators, can arrange any urgent medical treatment or emergency evacuation as deemed necessary for your safety and that all such costs will be borne by you and/or your travel insurer.

You also agree that upon completion of our tour booking form and payment of your deposit that you release all claims of liability against Bhutan & Beyond (and all staff) and any and all of our partner operators overseas, including all their staff, for any personal injury, death, property damage, loss or inconvenience sustained by you as a result of this tour, be it a private journey or as part of a small group tour.

## How to book

Contact James Irving at Bhutan & Beyond by telephone on + 61 7 5525 2845, toll free on 1300 367 875 (then press 1#) or by email at [james@bhutan.com.au](mailto:james@bhutan.com.au) to reserve your place.

For any initial enquiries about the itinerary, email Heather McNeice at [heathermcneice@mac.com](mailto:heathermcneice@mac.com)

For any questions about the photography aspects of the trip, or camera gear, contact Andrew at [peacocka@rocketmail.com](mailto:peacocka@rocketmail.com)

