



BHUTAN & BEYOND

Rhododendron Festival Tour

09 – 18 April 2023

Introduction:

After the awesome flight into Paro experience the 4 valleys of Paro, Thimphu, Phobjikha & Punakha. This small group tour caters to a maximum of 8 persons. Furthermore, it features a visit to the Rhododendron festival, the most important sights in Thimphu city; the remote beauty of the Phobjikha valley and the splendour of the magnificent Punakha Dzong. Finally, a special pilgrimage hike to Taktsang Monastery (Tigers Nest) in Paro. This tour combines the very best the Kingdom of Bhutan has to offer in western Bhutan.

Tour Itinerary Overview.

- 3 nights Thimphu with sightseeing, hiking and shopping options.
- 2 nights Phobjikha valley for hiking and exploring.
- 2 nights Punakha valley with monastery & Dzong visits.
- 2 nights Paro valley with Taktsang Monastery hike, shopping & sightseeing.

Reasons To Book This Small Group Tour

- We only take a maximum of 8 persons on our tours.
- Witness the Rhododendron Festival.
- We tailor our tours for less driving and more sightseeing!
- 19 years' experience, service & knowledge.
- Competitive pricing & well-constructed itineraries.
- Access to our exclusive travel app COMPANION
- Our comprehensive Bhutan Visitor Information planning guide.
- ATAS Accredited via our parent company MTA Travel.

CALL THE BHUTAN TRAVEL EXPERTS ON AUS [toll free](tel:1300367875), James – [0412 416 111](tel:0412416111), Nicola – [0413 598 669](tel:0413598669)

Tour Inclusions:

- English speaking guide, driver & private coach.
- All touring & transfers throughout your journey.
- Bhutanese style 3* hotel accom with private bathrooms.
- All meals including 2 bottles of water daily.
- All monument & entrance fees, hiking & sightseeing.
- Bhutan visa fees & visa processing.
- Sustainable development fee (SDF) & local taxes.
- Witness the Rhododendron festival.
- Bank transfer & communication fees.
- Professionally operated by Bhutan Tourism Corp – BTCL.



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T: 1300 367 875 (toll free) T: 07 5661 1605.

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Tour Exclusions:

- Flights to/from Paro are additional.
- Personal items: phone calls, laundry, drinks, designer coffee's etc.
- Tipping – we will advise your tipping regime.
- Travel Insurance – mandatory to enter Bhutan.
- Any COVID-19 PCR or RAT tests required.

Available On Request:

- Upgrade to Business Class on your flights.
- Ex-Australia airfares.
- Stopovers & additional Asian arrangements.

Cancellation Conditions:

- Deposit date until 35 days prior arrival in Bhutan - Land tour deposit is refundable [less B&B service fees](#).
- 35 Days or less prior to arrival in Bhutan - No land tour refund permitted.

Please note: - These conditions cover land travel arrangements only, not airfares, which are subject to their own cancellation conditions.

Sunday 09 April 2023

Paro Valley to Thimphu Valley (1 hr 30 mins)

After clearing immigration and customs you will be greeted by your BTCL guide and driver. Transfer to Bhutan's capital Thimphu, travelling through the spectacular countryside en-route. All the houses and buildings in the Kingdom are painted and constructed in traditional Bhutanese style.

On arrival into Thimphu take lunch at a local restaurant. Enjoy the remainder of the day to explore Thimphu. Start with Centenary where the locals go for a wide range of produce. , before a visit to the National Memorial Chorten followed by the Takin Preserve – home to Bhutan's most unusual national mammal.

Overnight Thimphu – [Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel](#).



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Monday 10 April:

Sightseeing in the Thimphu Valley today.

This morning visit the awesome Buddha Dordenma statue located at Kuenselphodrang. The statue is made of bronze and gilded in gold. It is considered the largest Buddha Shakyamuni statue in the world. There is also an excellent 3 km hike option through Kuenselphodrang Nature Park which offers sensational valley views.

View the majestic Trashichhoe Dzong (visits are only possible after business hours on weekdays or at the weekend) and visit the nearby beautiful Tara Lhaden Zhingkhom lhakang (temple).

Visit the 'Simply Bhutan' display village, where you can experience traditional Bhutanese village life; ara tasting (local spirit); suja tasting (butter tea); try your hand at archery and more.

This afternoon other places of interest to visit are the celebrated Royal Textile Academy & Zorig Chusum – the Institute of the 13 Arts & Crafts of Bhutan (where you can interact with the students); Don't forget to take a wander along Thimphu's main street, Norzin Lam, which offers good shopping and the Craft Bazaar.

Overnight Thimphu – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Tuesday 11 April:

Thimphu to Phobjikha Valley (4+ hrs)

This morning you will be transferred by road eastwards to the Phobjikha Valley. En-route pass the Semtokha Dzong. This was built in 1629 & the oldest fortress of its kind that guarded the Thimphu valley. Today it is a monastery. Continue ascending to Dochu La (pass) to view the 108 Stupas. These were commissioned by a former Queen as a memorial to those who lost their lives during the low intensity conflict in late 2002. This was

Tuesday 11 April – continued.

when Bhutan evicted Indian separatist rebels camped in the jungle on the Bhutan – Indian border. On a clear day you will witness a breathtaking view of the eastern Himalaya.

When the Wangdue Phodrang Dzong comes into view, notice the large cacti that cover the hillside below. These were planted long ago to discourage invaders from climbing the steep slope to the Dzong. From the road view Rinchengang, one of Bhutan's oldest villages, which did not have access to water, electricity or schooling until the early 1990's. The craftsmen of Rinchengang are sought after for their skills in construction of Dzongs and Lhakhangs (temples).



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Tuesday 11 April - continued

Phobjikha is a glacial valley on the western slopes of the Black Mountains. It is one of the most beautiful open valleys in Bhutan. Potatoes are this region's primary cash crop and mainly exported to India. Phobjikha is also one of the most important wildlife preserves in the country and the winter home (late October to early February) of the rare black necked crane, which annually flies in from Tibet. There are also muntjaks (barking deer), wild boar, sambar, Himalayan black bear, leopard and red foxes.

Overnight Phobjikha Valley – [Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.](#)

Wednesday 12 April:

At leisure in the Phobjikha Valley.

While you are in Phobjikha you will visit the Black Crane nature information centre. Furthermore, visit the sacred Gangtey Monastery plus enjoy time to wander through Gangtey village and hike the Gangtey Nature Trail. There are many additional hikes available in this beautiful valley and your guide will advise you the best options.

Time permitting take an excursion to the remote Phobji region of the valley for a flat hike through temples, farmhouses and tiny villages.

Overnight Phobjikha Valley – [Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.](#)

Thursday 13 April:

Phobjikha Valley to Punakha Valley. (2+ hrs)

Depart early this morning to the Punakha Valley which holds the title as the winter capital because of its more temperate climate.

Arriving into Punakha stop at the markets in Mesina. After that visit Chimi Lhakhang, a monastery built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley (also known as the Divine Madman or Mad Monk), which is a pleasant, easy 20 minute walk across paddy fields. It is believed that childless women who visit the temple will conceive after receiving a "wang" (blessing) from the resident monk.

Take lunch at a local restaurant. This afternoon enjoy an orientation tour of the valley. This includes the nunnery and an excursion along a delightful country lane to the small village of Talo. Here you can wander through the serene grounds of the monastery with its beautiful gardens.

Overnight Punakha Valley – [Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.](#)



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Friday 14 April:

Sightseeing & hiking in Punakha.

This morning visit the dramatic Punakha Dzong, which formerly served as the seat of the government. It is still the winter residence of the Dratsheng (Central Monk Body). This Dzong is an excellent example of how a medieval fortress, and a centre of both monastic and administrative functions, has evolved for modern day use.

This afternoon we recommend a fascinating hike to Khamsum Yulley Namgyel Chorten through fields of vegetables, rice paddies and tiny hamlets. This Chorten holds very special significance. It was consecrated in 1999 and dedicated to the protection of the former Crown Prince – today's current King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

Overnight Punakha Valley – Bhutan Style 3* Hotel.

Saturday 15 April:

Punakha Valley to Thimphu (3+ hrs)

Depart Punakha this morning for your transfer westwards to the Paro Valley, once again traversing Dochu La. Enroute make a stop at the Lamperi Botanical Gardens at Dochu La to witness the spectacle of the Rhododendron festival.

After a picnic lunch at the festival continue on your journey to Thimphu. Remainder of the day at leisure in Thimphu.

Overnight Thimphu – Bhutan Style 3* Hotel.

Sunday 16 April:

Thimphu to Paro Valley (1 hr 20 mins)

This morning you have the option to travel north up the Thimphu valley and hike through the forest to Tango Goemba (2hr round trip). Before transferring back westwards to the Paro Valley.

You will enjoy a traditional farmhouse lunch today with the option of enjoy a Bhutanese hot stone bath. (costs for the bath additional approx US\$18.00). Alternatively visit Paro Dzong with it's cantilever & time permitting Paro museum.

Overnight Paro Valley – Bhutan Style 3* Hotel.



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Monday 17 April:

Sightseeing & Hiking in the Paro Valley.

This morning take a pilgrimage hike to the very revered Taktsang Monastery, also known as Tigers Nest. All Bhutanese Buddhists strive to make this pilgrimage at least once in their lives. Each step they take on the trail awards merit for their future. Choose between a 1.5 hour round trip hike to the Monastery viewpoint or a longer 5 hour and more strenuous hike into the Monastery itself.

Tigers Nest clings impossibly to a cliff of rock at 800 m above the valley floor and where Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a tigress to subdue the local demons. This was followed by 3 months meditation in a cave still visible in the monastery. In 1998 the monastery was seriously damaged by fire and has since been painstakingly reconstructed to its original condition and consecrated by the 4th King in 2005.

Take a Bhutanese vegetarian lunch at the Taktsang Viewpoint cafe before finishing your hike. Finally visit the nearby Kyichu Lhakhang – one of Bhutan's oldest and most beautiful temples boasting an orange tree that perpetually bears fruit.

Overnight Paro Valley – [Bhutan Style 3*Hotel](#).

Tuesday 18 April:

Day of departure.

Morning departure from your hotel to Paro Airport for your onward flight.



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