

BHUTAN & BEYOND

## Bhutan Luxury Explorer Itinerary – 8 nights

### Introduction:

After the awesome flight into Paro experience the 4 valleys of Paro, Thimphu, Phobjikha & Punakha. This private luxury tour includes visits to 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 private tour offers daily departures and includes accommodation at some of Bhutan's best luxury lodges & resorts.*

### Tour Itinerary Overview.

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

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

### Why Travel With Bhutan & Beyond?

- Bhutan & Beyond offers 22 years' experience, service & knowledge.
- Maximise your Bhutan experience with one of our top-rated Bhutanese guides.
- Immerse yourself in the vibrant Buddhist culture of Bhutan.
- We tailor our tours for less driving and more exploring!
- Competitive pricing and best mix of luxury options.
- Exceptionally well-constructed & flexible itineraries to suit your personal requirements.
- We provide a comprehensive & regularly updated Bhutan visitor guide.
- Experts at combining Bhutan with [India](#) & [Nepal](#).
- Full support from Bhutan & Beyond throughout.
- ATIA (formerly ATAS) Accredited via our parent company MTA Travel
- Access to our exclusive travel app COMPANION

### Bhutan Luxury Explorer Inclusions:

- Same personal guide & driver with private SUV.
- All touring & transfers throughout your journey.
- 5\* Le Meridien Hotel, Thimphu CBD – for 2 nights
- Luxury Gangtey Lodge, Phobjikha – for 2 nights
- Luxury COMO Uma Resort, Punakha – for 2 nights
- Luxury COMO Uma Resort or Zhiwa Ling Heritage Resort Paro – for 2 nights
- All meals (often gourmet) & bottled water daily.
- Breakfasts & dinners taken at luxury hotels.
- Lunches taken at local restaurants.



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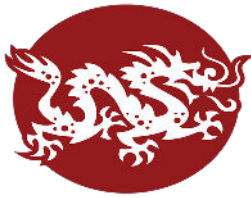


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- All monument & entrance fees, hiking and exploring as per the itinerary.
- Bhutan visa fees & processing.
- Bhutan 'Sustainable Development Fee' (SDF) & local taxes.
- Bhutan & Beyond bank transfers for payments to Bhutan suppliers.
- Professionally operated by Bhutan Tourism Corp Ltd.

### Bhutan Luxury Explorer Exclusions:

- International airfares to/from Bhutan.
- Personal bank charges incurred making payments to Bhutan & Beyond.
- Personal items – laundry, drinks (except Gangtey Lodge), tel calls, tips etc.
- Designer Coffees always at extra cost.
- Travel Insurance is essential when travelling to Bhutan.

### Cancellation Conditions:

- Deposit date until 60 days prior arrival in Bhutan - Land tour deposit is refundable less [B&B service fees](#).
- For this luxury tour, additional deposits will be required by each hotel & we will provide you with the hotel's own terms & conditions should you need to cancel prior to your final payment due date.
- 60 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.*

### Day 1:

#### Paro Airport to Thimphu City (1 hr 20 mins drive time, altitude 2350m)

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 make a stop at the Tachogang Lhakhang (iron bridge). 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, both by vehicle and on foot. Your options include visits to the National Memorial Chorten; the celebrated Royal Textile Academy (closed Sun/PH) and the Takin Preserve – home to Bhutan's most unusual national mammal.

Overnight Thimphu – [Le Meridien](#) – Deluxe room.



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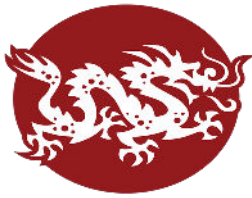


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### Day 2:

Today we highly recommend you visit the following.

The Buddha Dordenma statue located at Kuenselphodrang (just outside the city). 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 the adjacent 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 '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.

*Other recommended places to visit, depending on your preference, & in consultation with your guide are.*

- Zorig Chusum – the Institute of the 13 Arts & Crafts of Bhutan (closed Sat/Sun/PH & sometimes closed to visitors at other times)
- The National Library, which holds a vast collection of ancient Buddhist manuscripts. (closed Sat/Sun & PH)
- Folk Heritage Museum open daily (closed PH)
- Hand-made paper making factory. (closed Sun & PH)
- Nado incense factory (closed Sat/Sun & PH)
- Institute of Traditional Medicine – visitors only permitted to the museum & library. (closed Sat/Sun & PH)
- Visit the Thimphu Post Office to get your personalized postage stamp printed. (Mon-Fri & Sat am)
- Centenary Market daily produce market, (FRI-SUN) home-wares, handicrafts and clothes are also included
- Take a wander along Thimphu's main street, Norzin Lam, which offers good shopping and the Craft Bazaar which focuses on Bhutanese produced handicrafts .
- For those interested in quality weavings and & art visit the Gagyel Lhundrup weaving centre. Here you can interact with the weavers. (closed Sun & PH)
- The adjacent S. Bishwa art gallery showcases Thimphu's emerging local art scene and well worth a visit. (open daily)
- The city bars & coffee shops are also worth checking out. Your guide will advise you the best options.
- Travel up the valley & take a forest hike to Tango Monastery which houses a university of Buddhism for monks.
- There are other 1/2 day/ day hikes possible in the Thimphu valley & your guide will recommend suitable hike options depending on the season and your prior hiking experience.

**Overnight Thimphu – Le Meridien – Deluxe room.**



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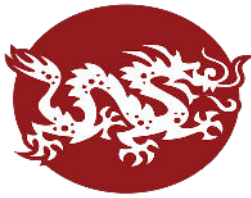


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### Day 3:

#### Thimphu to Phobjikha Valley (5+ hrs, alt 2900m)

This morning depart eastwards to the Phobjikha Valley passing the Semtokha Dzong, built in 1629 & the oldest fortress of its kind that guarded the Thimphu valley, which today it is a monastery. Ascend to Dochu La (pass-3110m) 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 when Bhutan evicted Indian rebels camped in the jungle on the Bhutan–Indian border. On a clear day you will witness a breathtaking view of the eastern Himalaya and depending on the time of the year the vista can vary from alpine snow (November – March) to a profusion of blossoms (March – May) splashed among the soft green of the wild herbs and forest trees.

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).

Phobjikha is a glacial valley on the western slopes of the Black Mountains and is one of the most beautiful open valleys in Bhutan. It 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.

Potatoes are this region’s primary cash crop and mainly exported to India.

The delightful Gangtey Lodge offers a very personalized and intimate experience. With wonderful valley views, gourmet dining and just 12 very large farmhouse suites you will feel very much at home in this special valley which offers some excellent hiking & Buddhist cultural opportunities.

#### Overnight Phobjikha Valley – [Gangtey Lodge](#) – Farmhouse Suite

### Day 4:

#### Exploring in the Phobjikha Valley.

While you are in Phobjikha visit the Black Crane nature information centre and the sacred Gangtey Monastery. Furthermore, 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. Or just soak up the ambience, spa and cuisine at the lodge.

There are also a wide range of special activities the lodge can organize for you.

#### Overnight Phobjikha Valley – [Gangtey Lodge](#) – Farmhouse Suite



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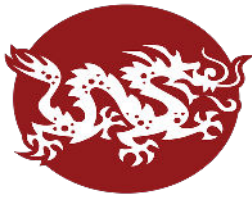


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### Day 5:

#### Phobjikha Valley to Punakha Valley. (3 hrs drive time, alt 1310m)

Depart this morning to the Punakha Valley which holds the title as the winter capital because of its more temperate climate. The temperature here is much warmer than surrounding valleys, due its lower altitude.

Arriving into the Punakha valley visit Chimi Lhakhang, a monastery built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley (also known as the Divine Madman or Mad Monk) who has a very colourful history. It is believed that childless women who visit the temple will conceive after receiving a “wang” (blessing) from the resident monk.

After lunch enjoy an orientation tour of the valley including a visit to the local nunnery and an excursion to the traditional villages of Nobgang & Talo. Nobgang is home to the 4 Queens of the 4th King (all sisters!). Talo offers the opportunity to stroll the serene grounds & beautiful gardens of the local monastery. Before arriving for some relaxation at your resort.

The COMO Uma Punakha resort has one of the best aspects in Bhutan, looking northwards up the valley towards the main eastern Himalaya range. Enjoy the stunning views from your room, the restaurant and the terrace. Offering full spa facilities, and attention to detail, this resort will be another major highlight of your journey in Bhutan.

#### Overnight Punakha Valley – [COMO Uma Resort](#) – Valley View room

### Day 6:

#### Exploring & hiking in Punakha.

This morning, we recommend a hike along the Punakha suspension bridge, Bhutan's longest, before a visit to the dramatic Punakha Dzong, which formerly served as the seat of the government and is still the winter residence of the Dratsheng (Central Monk Body). This is Bhutan’s most spectacular Dzong and an excellent example of how a medieval fortress, and a centre of both monastic and administrative functions, has adapted and evolved for modern day use. Don’t forget a visit to Kaja Throm the daily produce market.

Take lunch at a local restaurant or enjoy a picnic lunch overlooking the Dzong and river. 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 being consecrated in 1999 and dedicated to the protection of the former Crown Prince – today’s current King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

#### Overnight Punakha Valley – COMO Uma Resort – Valley View room



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### Day 7:

#### **Punakha Valley to Paro Valley (4 hrs +)**

Depart Punakha this morning for your drive westwards to the Paro Valley, once again traversing Dochu La, and arriving in Paro town in time for a late lunch at one of the local restaurants.

This afternoon consider a visit to the National Museum (Ta Dzong), located in an ancient watchtower above the dzong, to view the fine collection of historical Thangka paintings, textiles, weapons and other artefacts. Next walk down into the Rinpung Dzong itself, before a visit to the CSI daily market which offers locally produced goods from cottage and small industries in Bhutan. Finally, time permitting take a wander along the main streets which offer good shopping for jewellery and handicrafts.

#### **Overnight Paro Valley – [COMO Uma Resort](#) – Valley View room**

### Day 8:

#### **Exploring & hiking in the Paro Valley.**

Early 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 and each step they take on the trail counts towards credits 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. This is where Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a tigress, to subdue the local demons, 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.

Returning from the hiking trail, continue down the valley to view the recently restored Drugyel Dzong (14km from Paro). This is the historical site of the Fort of Drukpa Victory, from which the Bhutanese used to repel the Tibetan invaders again and again. Followed by a visit to Kyichu Lhakhang – one of Bhutan's oldest and most beautiful temples boasting an orange tree that perpetually bears fruit.

This afternoon enjoy the facilities of offer at the COMO Uma Paro resort.

#### **Overnight Paro Valley – [COMO Uma Resort](#) – Valley View room**

### Day 9:

#### **Day of departure.**

Early morning departure from your hotel to Paro Airport for your onward flight.



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