Focus On Bhutan Itinerary – 11 nights

BHUTAN & BEYOND

Tour Introduction:

This tour combines the very best the Kingdom of Bhutan has to offer in the west & central regions.

- This private tour visits 5 different valleys Thimphu, Phobjikha, Bumthang, Punakha, Paro along with Trongsa the location of Bhutan's very best museum. This tour features the most important sights in Thimphu city; the remote beauty of the Phobjikha & Bumthang valleys & the splendour of the magnificent Punakha Dzong. Finally a special pilgrimage hike to Taktsang Monastery (Tigers Nest) in Paro.
- This tour optimises valuable time to see the best sites in each valley.
- The itinerary detailed below is designed for private travellers and can be tailored to suit your exact requirements.
- All hiking is optional, though you must be able to climb a steep set of stairs to gain entry to the magnificent Punakha Dzong.

Tour Itinerary Overview.

- 2 nights Thimphu with exploring, hiking and shopping options.
- 2 nights Phobjikha valley for hiking and exploring.
- 2 nights Bumthang valley – Lhakhangs, monasteries, hiking & weaving
- 1 night Trongsa with Dzong, museum visit and hiking.
- 2 nights Punakha valley with exploring, monastery & Dzong visits & hiking.
- 2 nights Paro valley with Taktsang Monastery hike, exploring & shopping

CALL THE BHUTAN TRAVEL EXPERTS ON
James – 0412 416 111, Nicola – 0413 598 669

Why Book with Bhutan & Beyond?

- Bhutan & Beyond are Bhutan experts with 22 years' experience, service & knowledge.
- Bhutan & Beyond has access to Bhutan's very best Bhutanese guides.
- Immerse yourself in the vibrant Buddhist culture of Bhutan.
- We offer the option to choose between HALF BOARD or FULL BOARD land package.
- Exceptionally well-constructed & flexible itineraries ensuring less driving & more exploring.
- Competitive pricing & luxury hotel upgrade options.
- Option to substitute 3* hotels for farm home stays in some valleys.
- We provide a comprehensive pre-departure planning kit, regularly updated.
- Full support from Bhutan & Beyond throughout.
- Experts at combining Bhutan with India & Nepal.
- AITA (formerly ATAS) Accredited via our parent company MTA Travel.
- Access to our exclusive & celebrated travel app COMPANION.

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Your Bhutan FULL BOARD Land Package Inclusions:

- English speaking guide & driver with SUV or minibus.
- All touring & transfers throughout your journey.
- Traditional 3-star hotel accom with private bathrooms.
- All meals (Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner) & two 500 ml bottles of water per person daily.
- All sightseeing & hiking as per your itinerary.
- All monument & entrance fees.
- Bhutan visa fees & processing
- Bhutan Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) & local Bhutan taxes.
- Bhutan & Beyond bank transfers for payments to Bhutan suppliers.
- Professionally operated by Bhutan Tourism Corp Ltd (BTCL).
- Comprehensive Trip Planner & full support from Bhutan & Beyond.
- ATIA (formerly ATAS) Accredited via our parent company MTA Travel.
- Access to our exclusive travel app COMPANION.
- Option to substitute 3* hotels for farm home stays in some valleys.

Your Bhutan FULL BOARD Land Package Excludes:

- International airfares to/from Bhutan.
- Personal bank charges incurred making payments to Bhutan & Beyond.
- Personal items – laundry, drinks, designer coffee's, tel calls, tips etc.
- Luxury hotel upgrades are additional costs.
- Travel Insurance is essential when travelling to Bhutan.
- Any COVID-19 PCR or RAT tests required.

The additional exclusions when travelling on a HALF BOARD basis is lunch is at your own expense (please budget @US$ 10-12 pp per day) along with all monument and entrance fees.

Optional Activities: Please ensure your travel insurance covers you for these activities.

- White Water Rafting – Punakha Valley. US$125.00 for up to 5 persons.
- Archery in Paro @ US$7.00 pp.
- Mountain bike hire in Paro & Thimphu from US$25 pp per ½ day.
- Cooking class at Paro farmhouse & hot stone bath US$25.00 per person
- Hot stone bath at Paro Farmhouse US$18.00 per person.

Cancellation Conditions Land Tour:

- Deposit date until 45 days prior arrival in Bhutan – Land tour deposit is refundable less B&B service fees.
- 45 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.

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Day 1:

Paro Valley to Thimphu Valley (1 hr 20 mins drive time, altitude 2350m)

After clearing immigration and customs you will be greeted by your BTCL guide and driver and transferred 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 check-in to your hotel and take lunch. 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 – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel

Day 2:

Sightseeing in Thimphu.

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 including a traditional Bhutanese lunch. At 'Simply Bhutan' you can experience ara tasting (local spirit); suja tasting (butter tea); try your hand at archery and enjoy a cultural performance of song & dance, plus much more.

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

- orig 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)
- Hand-made paper making factory. (closed Sun & PH)
- Nado incense factory (closed Sat/Sun & PH)
- Folk Heritage Museum (closed 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)
- The daily Centenary farmer's market for fresh produce includes the sale of clothing & homewares & souvenirs (Fri-Sun).

- Take a wander along Thimphu's main street, Norzin Lam, which offers good shopping
- The Craft Bazaar which focuses on Bhutanese produced handicrafts
- For those interested in quality weavings and local art visit the Gagyel Lhundrup weaving centre. Here you can interact with the weavers. (closed Sun & PH)
- The S. Bishwa art gallery is also worth a visit.
- The city bars & coffee shops are also worth checking out. Your guide will advise you the best options.
- Travel up the valley & 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 – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 3:

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

This morning you will be transferred by road eastwards to the Phobjikha Valley. En-route pass the Semtokha Dzong. This was built in 1629 & is 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, commissioned by a former Queen as a memorial to those who lost their lives during the low intensity conflict in late 2002. This was 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. Depending on the time of the year the vista can vary from alpine snow (November – February) to a profusion of blossoms (March – May).

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)

Potatoes are Phobjikha's primary cash crop and mainly exported to India. Phobjikha is a glacial valley on the western slopes of the Black Mountains and is one of the most beautiful open valleys in Bhutan. Furthermore it is also one of the most important wildlife preserves in the country. It is 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.

Day 4:

Sightseeing & Hiking in Phobjikha.

While you are in Phobjikha you will visit the Black Crane nature information centre and the sacred Gangtey Monastery.

Also 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. One is the remote Phobji area further up the valley. Here you can take an easy, flat hike through temples, farm houses and small villages.

Overnight Phobjikha Valley – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 5:

Phobjikha Valley to Choekhor Valley (5 hrs drive time, altitude 2800m)

This morning depart Phobjikha to the central Bumthang region comprising the 4 valleys Choekhor, Tang, Ura and Chhume. Traverse the Pele La (Pass) which crosses through the Black Mountains National Park and divides western and central Bhutan and stop for lunch near Trongsa, where you will spend more time on your return journey. Keep a watchful eye out for Rhesus Macaques (Brown Monkeys) on the side of the road. The Trongsa Dzong is perched at the end of a ridge and seems to hang in space at the head of the valley. The Dzongs location afforded it great power over this part of the country as the only foot and mule trail between east and western Bhutan leads straight through Trongsa and through the Dzong itself.

On arrival in the Bumthang region notice the large fields of buckwheat that cover the valleys.....buckwheat noodles and pancakes are a Bumthang speciality. Enjoy the remainder of the afternoon at leisure. There are short walks and hikes to choose from and your guide will be happy to make recommendations.

Overnight Choekhor Valley – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 6:

Sightseeing in the Bumthang Region.

Today your sightseeing includes visits to the Wangdicholing Palace (exterior access only) and one or both of the Jambay & Kurjey Lhakhangs. These are the oldest two monasteries in the kingdom and all the former Kings of Bhutan are cremated at Kurjey Lhakhang. You can enjoy a hike from these lhakhangs back to your hotel for lunch.

Other options include the Tamshing Monastery where about 95 Monks reside – most are under 15 and from poorer families who cannot afford to send their children to state school; then make a visit to the nearby 'Burning Lake' and learn its dark legend.

Day 6 - continued

Time permitting, drop in at the Swiss Farm to taste local produce including sweet cheese, apple brandy and locally brewed wine and beer. Alternatively enjoy one of the other hikes available in this region or find a nice quiet spot at the hotel to catch up on some reading.

Overnight Choekhor Valley – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 7:

Choekhor Valley to Trongsa (2 hrs)

Today transfer back towards Trongsa via the Chhume valley for the opportunity to shop for excellent local handicrafts and textiles. This region is renowned for its exceptionally high-quality weavings. The Trongsa Dzong is the ancestral home of the Royal Family of Bhutan and has added the excellent Tower of Trongsa Museum into it's ancient watchtower, which you will visit this afternoon, followed by an excursion to the Dzong itself.

Alternatively, there is a good 2 hour valley hike below the Dzong that your guide will advise you on.

Overnight Trongsa – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 8:

Trongsa to Punakha Valley (5+ hrs, alt 1310m)

Depart early this morning to the Punakha Valley which holds the title as the winter capital because of its more temperate climate. Take lunch at a cafeteria en-route. Arriving into the Punakha valley 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.

Time permitting visit the Sangchen Dorji Llakhang & Nunnery or the small village of Talo where you can wander through the beautiful and serene gardens of the local monastery.

Overnight Punakha Valley – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 9:

Sightseeing & hiking in Punakha.

This morning you have the option of a hike across the Punakha suspension bridge, the longest in Bhutan, followed by a visit to the dramatic Punakha Dzong, which formerly served as the seat of 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 to visit Kaja Throm, Punakha's daily produce market.

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 – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 10:

Punakha Valley to Paro Valley (4 hrs +)

Depart Punakha early this morning for your transfer westwards to the Paro Valley. Once again traversing Dochu La and arriving in Paro for lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon enjoy an orientation tour of the major features in Paro town including Paro Dzong with its cantilever bridge and the National Museum to view the fine collection of ancient Thangkha paintings, textiles, weapons and other artefacts, 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 – Bhutanese Style 3* Hotel.

Day 11:

Sightseeing & 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. Each step they take on the trail counts accrues merit points 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.

Day 11 - continued

Tigers Nest clings impossibly to a cliff of rock at 800 m above the valley floor and is where Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a tigress to subdue the local demons. That 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.

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.

Overnight Paro Valley – Bhutanese Style 3*Hotel.

Day 12:

Day of departure.

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