



On The Trail of Guru Rinpoche - 8 nights

BHUTAN & BEYOND

The movements & legends of Guru Rinpoche and also features the many sights of the quirky capital Thimphu; the remote beauty of the Phobjikha Valley; the splendour of the magnificent Punakha Dzong and culminates with a pilgrimage hike to the majestic Taktsang Monastery (Tigers Nest) in Paro valley.

Bhutan FULL BOARD Land Tour 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.

Bhutan FULL BOARD Land Tour Exclusions:

- Flights to/from Paro are additional.
- Personal bank charges incurred making payments to Bhutan & Beyond.
- Personal items: phone calls, laundry, drinks, snacks, designer coffee's etc.
- [Luxury hotel](#) upgrades are additional costs
- [Tipping](#) – we will advise your tipping regime.
- [Travel Insurance](#) – is essential when travelling to Bhutan.
- Any COVID-19 PCR or RAT tests required.
-

Optional Adventure Activities: (costs additional & to be paid direct)

Subject to weather conditions you can undertake the following activities whilst in Bhutan & your guide will assist with arrangements. Please ensure your travel insurance covers you for biking & white-water rafting activities

- Mountain bike riding/bicycle hire. Paro & Thimphu valleys from US\$30.00 pp per 1/2 day
- White water rafting - Punakha Valley only from US\$125.00 for 1-5 persons
- Archery in Paro valley from US\$7.00 per person
- Cooking class at Paro farmhouse & hot stone bath US\$25.00 per person.
- Hot stone bath at Paro Farmhouse US\$18.00 per person.



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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.

Day 1:

Paro Valley to Thimphu Valley (1 hr 30 mins drive time, altitude 2350 m)

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 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/Mon & PH) and the Takin Preserve – home to Bhutan's most unusual national mammal.

Overnight Thimphu – Bhutanese 3* Style Hotel

Lunch at a local restaurant & dinner at your hotel.

Day 2:

Exploring the Thimphu Valley incl Guru Rinpoche Excursion.

Make an early visit to 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.

Travel up the valley to view/visit the majestic Trashichhoe Dzong (visits are only possible at weekend or after business hours on weekdays) you also have the option this morning of continuing up the valley and hike to Tango Monastery which houses a university of Buddhism for monks.



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Day 2 – continued

This afternoon enjoy a private excursion to the Tselung Ney Monastery by car. The journey will take over an hour each way. Between the 8th and 9th century Ugyen Guru Rinpoche and Khandru Yeshe Tshogyal visited Tshelung Nye in person. As well as leaving behind his footprint, they also left behind many other legacies for the benefit of future sentient beings. Guru Rinpoche hid many sacred religious treasures including medicinal pills, making the place exceptionally holy. From amongst these treasures are Lhacham Pemasal's skull filled with the water of longevity and the self-emanated stone vase of longevity. Thus, this holy place came to be popularly known as Tshelung Nye, the Sacred place of Prophetic Longevity.

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)
- 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.

Overnight Thimphu – Bhutanese 3* Style Hotel.

Breakfast & dinner at your hotel. Lunch at a local restaurant



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Day 3:

Thimphu to Phobjikha Valley (4-5 hrs, alt 2900 m)

This morning transfer by road eastwards to the Phobjikha Valley. En-route pass the Semtokha Dzong, built in 1629 & the oldest fortress of its kind that guarded the Thimphu valley, which 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, 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 newly reconstructed Wangdue Phodrang Dzong come into view, notice the large cacti that cover the hillside below which, 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. 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.

While in Phobjikha visit the Black Crane nature information centre; the sacred Gangtey Goenpa (Monastery) plus enjoy time to wander through Gangtey village and hike the Gangtey Nature Trail. For the fit there are also a number of excellent longer day hikes in this beautiful region as detailed below.

We would recommend you hike the Gangtey Nature Trail on arrival as it is fairly flat & easy but a great introduction to this beautiful valley.

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

Breakfast & dinner at your hotels & lunch at a local restaurant.



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Day 4:

Exploring & hiking in the Phobjikha Valley.

This morning visit the Gangtey Sedra morning prayer: 5:30 am to 6:20 am every morning except on Monday morning (Ritual to the 21 Mother Tara; and 16 elderly arhats)

Explore the Phobjikha valley today as per the suggestions above or take an excursion further down to the more remote Phobji region of the valley. Here you can take an easy flat hike through villages, farm houses and small temples. Alternatively enjoy one of the excellent longer hikes listed below. Your guide will advise which hike is most suitable on the day.

Overnight Phobjikha Valley – Bhutanese 3* Style Hotel.

Breakfast & dinner at your hotel & lunch at a local restaurant.

Longtey Hike

If you are looking for a picturesque hike through some of the most beautiful parts of Gangtey, this is the one. A 30-minute drive will take you to the starting point in Longtey village, and the hike takes about 3-5 hours. The trail initially takes you through a small village where the yak herders put up their camps in the winter. From here you continue upwards through mysterious old growth rhododendron forest. For the next two hours or so, you might feel like you are in the settings of Lord of the Rings surrounded by tall old trees which appear to be living creatures around you. The last part through the forest is slightly steeper uphill until you reach the pass with impressive views of the Gangtey Goemba, the Shedra, and the rest of the valley. A great place for a picnic lunch before you continue on the path as it slopes down the valley towards the idyllic Kumbu village. It is possible to get picked up from here, or you may continue down to the Shedra.

Tongphushing Trail

This is a beautiful leisurely walk through the pine forest, farmland and the villages. The hike starts from Gangtey and continues through Tokha village all the way to the Phobjikha valley. The walk provides insight into village life, farming and also offers great views of the Phobjikha valley. The hike takes about 1 ½ - 2 hours



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Other Services Offer by the Gangtey Shedra.

- Witness philosophical debates or argument between monks: 10:30 am to 11:30 am every day from Tuesday to Saturday
- Meditation or Dharma talks [USD 25/person]: 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm everyday (on calm abiding, loving kindness, compassion or impermanence, etc.)
- Evening prayer: 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm (ritual to the protector deities; and prayers to {fulfill wishes; clear obstacles; enhance fortune or luck; increase longevity, etc.})
- Spiritual cleansing [USD 35/group of below 6 and USD 70/group of above 6]
- Consecrating prayer flags and other religious objects
- Smoke offering/Riwo Tsang Choed [Nu. 5000/service]
- Butter lamp offering [Nu.25/lamp]
- Prayers and wishes to your family or the deceased ones.

Day 5:

Phobjikha Valley to Punakha Valley (2.5 hrs, alt 1310 m)

Depart this morning to the Punakha Valley which holds the title as the winter capital because of its more temperate climate. Arriving into the Punakha area visit Chimi Lhakhang, a monastery built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley (also known as the Divine Madman or Mad Monk) with a very colourful history. It is believed childless women who visit the temple will conceive after receiving a 'wang' (blessing) from the resident monk. The walk across rice paddy fields takes about 20 minutes each way.

A visit to the dramatic Punakha Dzong, which has seasonal opening hours and your guide will amend your schedule as need be, is a must! This Dzong formally 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 & evolved for modern day use.

Overnight Punakha Valley – Bhutanese 3* Style Hotel.

Breakfast & dinner at your hotels & lunch at a local restaurant.



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Day 6:

On the trail of Guru Rinpoche in Punakha.

This morning take an excursion to Geon Tsephu Ney (sacred cave) is associated with the 8th-century saint, Guru Padmasambhava. It is said that after Guru's retreat at Maratika in Nepal, he visited this sacred cave and it is here that Guru Padmasambhava was able to see the full form of Amitayus, "Buddha of Long Life". Later a monastery was founded by Tsephu Trulku Gyeltshen Pelzang, a follower of Saint Goe Tsangpa. Among the many relics in the temple, the gold-plated replica of Zhabdrung's hat is the main one. It is around a 15-kilometer drive from Khuruthang town.

Either take this afternoon at leisure or travel up the valley & take 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 3* Style Hotel.

Breakfast & dinner at your hotel & lunch at a local restaurant.

Day 7:

Punakha Valley to Paro Valley (4 hrs, alt 2250 m)

Depart Punakha early morning for your transfer westwards to the Paro Valley, once again traversing Dochu La, before your visit to Simtokha Dzong also known as Sangak Zabdhon Phodrang.

This afternoon take a Guru Rinpoche excursion to Drakarpo. Guru Rinpoche had personally meditated in this monastery and many body prints still stand on testimony. Just below the monastery, is a cave where one has to pass through a narrow hole between the rocks to assess one's acts pious or sinful. Within the cave, the print of the Guru can be viewed, and one can also see the images of a sinful and a pious person. Also, in the cave there is the print of Paksamjoenshing and one can see the miraculous footprint of Guru Rinpoche. Drakarpo is about 4 km uphill through a farm road from Dhenka village in Paro Valley, before you reach Paro town. Finally, we recommend a wander along the main streets of Paro, which offer good shopping for jewellery and handicrafts.

Overnight Paro Valley – Bhutanese 3* Style Hotel.

Breakfast & dinner at your hotels & lunch at a local restaurant.



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Day 8:

Hiking & Exploring in the Paro Valley

This morning hike to the Taktsang Monastery, also known as Tigers Nest. This is Bhutan's most revered monastery, and all Bhutanese strive to make the pilgrimage here at least once in their lives. This visit is much more than 'just a hike' and each step gains merit points for the next part of life's journey. Choose between a 1.5 to 2 hour round trip hike to the Monastery viewpoint, or a longer 5 hour round trip, 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 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 lunch on the hiking trail and this afternoon visit Kyichu Lhakhang one of Bhutan's oldest and most beautiful temples, boasting an orange tree that perpetually bears fruit, before continuing further down the valley to visit 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.

Alternatively visit 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.

Overnight Paro Valley – Bhutanese 3* Style Hotel.

Breakfast & dinner at your hotel; lunch on the Taktsang hiking trail restaurant.

Day 09:

Day of departure.

Early morning departure from your hotel to Paro Airport in time to check-in for your onward flight.

END OF TOUR



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