



Bhutan Cultural Tour

9 nights / 10 days

Tour code : UBA-4003

Itinerary in detail

Day 1 - Arrive Paro

Half-day sightseeing in Paro. A representative picks you up at Paro airport and drives you to your hotel. After lunch we visit the National Museum, converted from the old watchtower of the Rimping dzong that overlooks the Paro valley and the river; Rimping dzong itself; Kyichu Temple, built by the King of Tibet during the 7th century; and Drugyel dzong. In addition, there is time to familiarize yourself with the town. Overnight at Hotel Gangtey Palace.

Day 2

Drive to Thimphu. After breakfast we drive over the Chuzom bridge, where the Paro and Thimphu rivers meet and where three stupas are placed, to Thimphu. The journey takes approximately one hour. Thimphu is the country's capital, and its recently upgraded main thoroughfare, Norzin Lam, is lined with shops, restaurants, retail arcades and public buildings. Overnight at Hotel Pedling.

Day 3

Sightseeing in Thimphu. Today's sightseeing tour includes visits to the National Memorial chorten, the Changangkha temple, Druptob nunnery, and the majestic Tashichoe dzong. Overnight at Hotel Pedling.

Day 4

Drive to Punakha. After breakfast we begin to drive eastwards and, after about an hour, climb up to the spectacular Dochu-La pass (3,140m) before descending down into the balmy Wangdi valley, arriving at Punakha two hours later. We take in a

morning visit to Punakha dzong, a massive structure built at the junction of two rivers. Punakha was Bhutan's capital until 1955 and the dzong still serves as the winter residence of the central monk body. We take a short side trip by foot, hiking up to Chimi Lhakhang, whose 14th century temple is dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kuenley, the Divine Madman. It is considered a temple of fertility and many childless women make a pilgrimage to its doors for a blessing. Overnight at Damchen Resort.

Day 5

Drive to Bumthang. Today we continue east past Wangdiphodrang dzong looming at an elevation of 1,300m above the river below, strategically located to protect the ancient trade route. Then, there's an ascent through the Black Mountains that divide western and central Bhutan to the Pele La pass (3,420m); white langur monkeys can often be spotted in the moss-draped forest beside the road. After an hour or two we come to the beautiful Chendibji chorten, built in the 19th century to commemorate the subjugation of a local demon. It is built in Nepali style, unusual for Bhutan, with painted eyes facing the four directions. After some time driving along the broad Mangde Chhu valley, we catch sight of the brooding white Trongsa dzong that seems to hang in space at the end of the valley. Dating back to the 16th century, the massive structure is the largest dzong in Bhutan. There are now 22 temples in the complex, and even though entry is restricted, you can climb the watchtower. After this, we continue eastwards another two to three hours over the Yotong La pass (3,425m) into the Bumthang region of central Bhutan, the cultural heartland of the country. A series of

four connected valleys, Bumthang is a deeply spiritual region shrouded in religious legend. Overnight at Rinchenling lodge.

Day 6

Bumthang sightseeing. The day is spent walking in peaceful, lovely Bumthang, the cultural and historic heart of Bhutan. Its barley fields, apple groves and meadows lie below huge hills that climb up towards the Himalayan mountain wall that separates Bhutan from Tibet. Our first stops are the 8th century Jambay Lhakhang, which dates back to the origins of Buddhism in Bhutan and is one of the two oldest temples in the Kingdom, and Kurje Lhakhang, the temple where Bhutan's kings are taken for their final cremation rites. We then cross the Chamkhar river before reaching Tamshing, a temple where the great tertön (discoverer of ancient texts) Pema Lingpa's heavy coat of mail is kept in the vestibule. People are permitted to try it on, and it is said that if they can circumambulate the inner sanctuary three times while wearing it, some of their sins will be expiated. We then head back to our hotel, visiting a Swiss Farm on the way. Overnight at Rinchenling lodge.

For those who want to try something different, we offer a hike to Kuenzangdra monastery and a session in a Bhutanese hot stone bath for relaxation.

Day 7

Explore Bumthang further, then drive back to Punakha. After breakfast, we further explore the fascinating valley of Bumthang, then head westwards, stopping along the way at Trongsa for lunch. Afterwards we visit Wangdiphodrang dzong and the last town on the highway, Wangdue, before entering western Bhutan. In the 17th century Wangdue played a critical role in unifying the western, central and southern regions of the country. We reach Punakha

in the late afternoon and overnight at Hotel Damchen Resort.

Day 8

Drive to Paro. After breakfast, we drive back to Paro re-crossing the Dochu-La pass where we stop for a while to view the Himalayan panorama and have lunch. We arrive in Paro in the afternoon and overnight at Hotel Gangtey Palace.

Day 9

Day Hike to Taktshang monastery. Perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the floor of the Paro valley, Taktshang translates as Tiger's Nest. Here, the only sounds you'll catch are those of wind, water and the chanting of monks. The trail is broad and the walk uphill affords spectacular views. For a close-up look at the cliff-hanging site, hike about two hours to a viewpoint on a hill top covered with prayer flags; from here Taktshang is clearly seen clinging to a sheer rock wall. Beyond the viewpoint, the path is narrow and steep as it climbs to a point above the temple, from where walkers descend to the building itself. The main deity of Taktshang is Dorji Drolo, the wrathful form of Guru Rinpoche, also known as Padmasambhava. The great tantric mystic is said to have flown here on the back of a tiger, a manifestation of his consort, Yeshi Tsogyal, when he brought the teachings of the Buddhist Dharma to Bhutan in the 8th century. The image of Dorji Drolo inside the temple is shown standing on a tiger. There are 13 sacred sites at Taktshang, and several meditation caves in the cliffs above. Lunch is organized for you at the Tiger Nest cafeteria, and, once again, we overnight at Hotel Gangtey Palace.

Day 10 - Tour concludes

Transfer takes you to Paro airport for your onward flight.