

DISCOVER BHUTAN

2012 ITINERARY

Day 1 - September 6: Meet the group for the first time in Los Angeles. Board Cathay Airlines for the trip across the Pacific and the International dateline. Stop at Narita, Tokyo. On to Bangkok.

Day 2 - September 7: A very short night in Bangkok airport due to crossing the International dateline.

Day 3 - September 8: Early morning departure on Druk Air, the only national carrier to Paro, Bhutan. The flight offers beautiful views of the Himalayas and hillside landscapes. On arrival and after visa formalities, we will be received by Associates Bhutan Adventure staff (aBa), eagerly awaiting us at the EXIT point to welcome us all to Bhutan. Load up the bus and drive through Paro Valley, enjoying the beauty of the valley and unique Bhutanese architecture. We have a 2 hr drive to Thimphu 7,544 ft (2300m) the capital of Bhutan. Thimphu has a real frontier to feel to it right now, it is rapidly developing with buildings mushrooming up in all directions. If time permits, we will explore the city by foot allowing you to see local life. Overnight Thimphu.

Day 4 - September 9: Thimphu local sightseeing includes: Visit to National Memorial Chorten built in memory of late third King in 1974. National Library: It was established in 1960s primarily to conserve the literary treasures which form a significant part of Bhutan's cultural heritage. Institute of Art and Craft: The Institute offers a six year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Then visit Folk Heritage Museums, which provides fascinating insights into Bhutanese culture and way of Life. Changangkha Monastery built in 15th century. Handicrafts Shops, a wide assortment of colorful, hand woven textiles and other craft products are available here.

Day 5 - September 10: Thimphu – Wangdee 6,954 ft (2120m) The 3 hour drive from Thimphu to Wangdee, on the National Highway via Dochula, leads from the cool of Thimphu to the hot, almost tropical Wangdee valley. From Thimphu the roads goes south to Simtokha 7,380 (2250m). It loops back over itself to become the east-west National Highway, which was constructed in 1984. About a kilometer past the turn-off there is a good view of Simtokha Dzong. The route climbs to the forestry research station at Yusupang, then through apple orchards and forests of Blue pine. On a hill above the road are Hongtsho Goemba and some monk's meditation cells. Ngawang Chhogyel founded this goemba in the 15th century. He was a cousin of Lama Drukpa Kunley and also founded Druk Choeding in Paro. At the village of Hongtsho 9,479 ft (2890m) there is an Immigration checkpoint that controls all access to eastern Bhutan. You must have a restricted- area travel permit to proceed. High on a ridge across the valley to the south is Trashigang Goemba. The road climbs to Dochula and we will stop to walk to the Little Monk Monastery, Trashigang Goemba. It's a 2 hour walk to Trashigang Goemba 10,496 ft (3200m). This goemba was built in 1786 by the 12th Je Khenpo, It is an important meditation center, and there are numerous small houses for pilgrims near by. In addition to

about 16 monks, there are a few nuns (nuns). Inside the lhakhang there are statues of several Je Khenpos who meditated here.

Once we get to the top and after tea and snacks, we will go inside and sit to receive blessings for a long life, sit with the monks and be a part of prayers, blessing of religious objects brought from town and tea after the activities. Then we will walk down to the bus and for lunch drive to Dochu-la pass 10,004 ft (3050m). Stopping briefly to take in the view of the great Himalayas and admire the chorten, Mani walls and prayer flags. Then descend to Wangdue Phodrang which is less than two hours drive. Visit Wangdue Dzong. Overnight at Kichu Resort. If time permits we will hike for an hour in the evening around the Kichu Resort.

Day 6 - September 11: Wangdue to Bumthang: After breakfast we drive to Bumthang, a 6 hr drive over Pelela pass 11,021 ft (3360m). After the pass we descend to Chendbji Chorten built in 18th Century, a large white structure beside a stream at 7,970 ft (2430m). The Chorten is patterned after Swayambhunath in Kathmandu and was built in the 19th century by Lama Shida, from Tibet, to cover the remains of an evil spirit that was killed at this spot. The proper name of this structure is chorten Charo Kasho: It is the westernmost monument in a 'chorten path' that was the route of early Buddhist missionaries. After we are done, we will walk to Chendbji Restaurant for lunch. After lunch we continue on to Trongsa and to Bumthang. If there is time we will stop at Trongsa to visit the museum. If not we will visit on the way back to Gangtey valley.

Bumthang 8,462 ft (2580m) is one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the holy heartland of Buddhism. The road winds steeply up to Yutong-la pass 11,086 ft (3380m) then runs down through dense coniferous forests to enter a wide, open cultivated valley, known as Chumey Valley. After noon we will visit Jambey Monastery built in the 7th century. It is one of the 108 monasteries which were built to subdue evil spirits in the Himalayan region. Overnight at Jakar.

Day 7 - September 12: Full day in Bumthang sightseeing includes a visit to Kurjey (body imprint) Monastery, one of the most sacred places in Bhutan as Guru Rinpoche meditated there. Then drive to visit Jakar Dzong which means Fortress of White Bird. In the afternoon we will visit Tamshing Lhakhang built in 1501, by the great treasure founder and visit Mebartsho lake, from which Terton Pema Lingpa discovered the hidden religious treasure in 15th century.

Day 8 - September 13: Jakar – Tang Valley 4,264 ft (1300m) Driving through Blue Pine forest in the Tang Valley we will enjoy the beauty of the old Bhutanese farm houses. The hike 1 hrs up hill to Ugyenchholing Museum, crossing over a suspension bridge and going through the farm house in Tang valley. Ugyen Choling Museum was a 16th-century palace, originally built by Deb Tshoki Dorje, a descendent of Dorji Lingpa. The present structures, including the lhakhang, servants' quarters and a massive residential building were rebuilt after their collapse in the 1897 earthquake.

The family that owns Ugyen Choling has turned the complex into a museum to preserve its legacy and provide a place for religious studies, research and solitude. Perhaps Asi Kunzang will be present to talk to our group about Bhutan. It is an interesting and well-executed facility that provides a worthwhile full-day outing from Jakar. Permanent exhibits in the main building are captioned with extensive, informative descriptions of the lifestyle and artworks of a Bhutanese noble family. Lunch at Ugyenchholing. Then drive back to Jakar for overnight at Hotel.

Day 9 - September 14: Jakar to Gangtey Valley

After breakfast we will be drive back to Gangtey, the road traverses hillsides high above the river and soon enters Pine Forest and passing through Chhume valley and up to the pass Yotong La Pass 11,020 ft (3,360m) marked by a Chorten and pray flags and down hill drive to Trongsa at 7,179 ft (2189m). Visit Trongsa Museum and drive to Chendebji Restaurant for lunch. After lunch we will be heading to Pele La which crosses the Black Mountains, the boundary between western and central Bhutan. Gangtey or Phubjikha valley is at 9,512 ft (2900m). Visit Gangtey Monastery and explore the valley. This valley is where the Black Neck Cranes return every winter from November through March. Overnight at Gangtey Resort

Day 10 - September 15: Gangtey to Wangdue Phodrang After breakfast drive down to Wangdue Phodrang. The drive is be all downhill through broad leaf forest. At times we shall be walking to keep our legs strong. Then check in to Kichu Resort, latter drive to Punakha and visit Punakha Dzong and drive back to stop for lunch and after lunch visit The Mad Monk Monastery walking though the Mechini village. Check into Kichu Resort.

Day 11 - September 16: Wangdee to Paro, Drive back to Thimphu, still trying our luck if we have a better sunny day to catch the Eastern Himalayan Ranges, once the group is done, we still drive down into Thimphu Valley, making our stop for lunch and having time to shop around Thimphu and latter in the afternoon drive back to Paro

Day 12 - September 17: Full day of Paro sightseeing. Morning drive to visit ruins of Drukgyel Dzong, Kyichu Monastery built in 7th century, Ta Dzong the watch tower, now the best natural history museums in Asia and conclude the visit with Paro Ringpung Dzong, built in 1646, now houses local Administration and monastic body.

Day 13 - September 18: : Full Day hike to Taktshang, which is the most famous of Bhutan's monastery, perched on the side of a cliff 2,952 ft (900m) above the floor of Paro valley, where the only sounds are the murmurs of wind and water and chanting of monks. The name means '**Tiger's nest**'. Guru Rimpoche is said to have flown to the site of the monastery on the back of a tigress. He then meditated in a cave for three months. The hike to the Tiger Monasteries will be close to 3 hours to get to the top, walking all up hill. At one hour we come to a view point and a small wooden teahouse for a rest and a cup of tea. The hike is a major part of any tourist itinerary and is very worthwhile for the spectacular view and historical interest. Closing dinner with our guides and staff.

Day 14 - September 19: Departure early morning to the airport for Bangkok and on to Ko Samui, Thailand

Day 14-18 - September 19-23: Ko Samui! Unscheduled time to integrate our Bhutan experience, relax and play on this lush green gem in the ocean, lovely accommodations, powder white beaches, great restaurants, snorkeling and shopping, gracious Thai residents...nothing to do but enjoy yourself. Heaven on earth! The last night we share a closing dinner at the Pavilion. Depart from hotel at noon on the 23th. Overnight in Bangkok.

Day 19- September 24:

Early morning departure from Bangkok to Los Angeles. Arriving in Los Angeles, September 26 in the afternoon! We are home again!