

Snowman Trek in Bhutan 2014

Itinerary dates: September 15 – October 16, 2014

Tour Leader: Beth Whitman

Known as the **hardest trek in the world**, this legendary adventure is for experienced and determined trekkers. The route essentially combines the **Jhomolhari and Laya treks**, passes through the **Lunana region**, and ends in **Bumthang**. The trek includes breathtaking landscapes and ultimately reaches an altitude of about 18,480 feet.

The group will meet in Bangkok for the flight to Paro, Bhutan. A welcome dinner will be arranged the night prior to departure (September 14) for all who can attend. Flights leave Bangkok very early on the morning of the 15th (usually 5:30 am) so it's best to arrive in Bangkok at least 24 hours prior to departure to Bhutan in the event of flight delays.

NOTE – Expect the following on trekking days: You'll rise early and, after breakfast, pack your bag and prepare your daybag with anything you'll need for the day (water, snacks, camera, etc.). Once the group departs on foot, the tents are dismantled by the staff and everything, including your main bag, is packed up on ponies or yaks (depending on the section of the trek). Though this entourage can be quite large, they will pass the group along the path and have camp set up again by the time the group arrives at the end of the day. Lunch and snacks are served along the way by the cook staff but you'll want to carry your own protein bars and treats each day.

ALSO – If you are comparing this itinerary to other published itineraries, note that distances, altitude and daily trek times vary because the trek has not been well documented and distances and altitude are best guesses.

Itinerary

Day 1

September 15, 2014 – Arrive Paro

Arriving in Bhutan, you'll immediately enjoy the magnificent beauty of the region. On a clear day, **spectacular vistas of the Himalaya**, the world's highest mountains, make way for the rich, green Paro Valley. Stepping off the plane, you'll be struck by the **crisp, fresh air**. You'll be met by your guide and driver immediately after going through visa control and customs and then proceed to your hotel.

Following lunch, you may have the opportunity to visit the **National Museum** where you'll see locally-made **textiles, ancient armor, household objects, thangkas, weapons** and many other **artifacts**. You may then visit **Rinpung Dzong** (monastery). If there's time you'll want to also walk Paro's one main street to visit the local shops. Dinner and overnight at [Bhutan Metta Resort and Spa](#) or similar in Paro.

Day 2

September 16, 2014 – Paro

The group will spend another day in Paro to help get acclimated to the elevation.

After an early breakfast, you'll head out to hike 2+ hours up to **Taktsang (Tiger's Nest)**, Bhutan's most iconic monastery, perched on the side of a hill. You'll enjoy the views and go to the temples at the top. You'll then start the walk back down, stopping at the tea shop/cafe, situated at the halfway point. Here, you will find an amazing view looking back up at Tiger's Nest. The group will then proceed down and have a picnic lunch in the forest. Dinner and overnight at [Bhutan Metta Resort and Spa](#) or similar in Paro.

Day 3

September 17, 2014 – Paro – Shana (start of trek)

Today, the group will take a bus to **Drukgyal Dzong** and from there start the trek to **Shana**, which follows the Paro River. If the weather cooperates, from here you'll see **Mt. Jhomolhari** (23,995 feet). On this first day of trekking, you'll pass farmhouses, cultivated fields, and small picturesque villages and will have to manoeuvre across a couple of suspension bridges. Overnight at camp in Shana.

Altitude 9,251 feet; Distance 8.6 miles; Time 5 – 6 hours.

Day 4

September 18, 2014 – Shana – Thangthangka

The trail follows the river through a **heavily forested area** (which will likely be quite cool) with a few isolated **farmhouses** along the way. In the afternoon, expect **rough terrain** as the trail winds up and down. You'll pass a junction en-route where another path leads north over the **Tremo La** to Tibet. Camp is in a meadow with a stone shelter.

Altitude 11,843 feet; Distance 13 miles; Time 7 – 8 hours.

Day 5

September 19, 2014 – Thangthangka – Jangothang

At the start of this day's hike, you'll have **views of Mt. Jhomolhari** (meaning 'Goddess of the Mountain Pass'). After passing a small army post, the trail slowly leaves the forest line and gradually **climbs into a beautiful valley**, passing Tegethang, a winter home of yak herdsman. Lunch will be served in one of the huts here. **Many yak** can be seen before arrival at Jhomolhari Base Camp (13,500 feet). High mountains overlook the camp and visible nearby are the **ruins of an old fortress** used to guard Bhutan against Tibetan invasions.

Altitude 13,500 feet; Distance 9.3 miles; Time 5 – 6 hours.

Day 6

September 20, 2014 – Jangothang (Jhomolhari Base Camp)

Today is a rest day. Though not actually a base camp for Jhomolhari (climbing from the Bhutan side is prohibited), it is located at the base of the mountain. This is a good day to take a break as you will have ascended nearly 6,000 feet in the previous three days. If you're up for it, there are **numerous day hikes** to take around this area.

Day 7

September 21, 2014 – Jangothang – Lingshi

Today the group will need to swap out the ponies with yaks as they will be better suited to the high altitude. The trek will start with a **long climb up** (3 – 4 hours) before reaching **Nyile La Pass** (15,419 feet). There will be spectacular views of **Jhomolhari**, **Jitchu Drake**, and **Tsheri Kang**. Also in the distance will be **Tiger Mountain**.

After the pass, you'll descend to a circular hut just below **Lingshi**, where you'll camp. Coming down from Lingshi, you'll have your first views of the **truly mystical dzong atop a high hill**.

Altitude 13,123 feet; Distance 10.5 miles; Time 6 – 7 hours.

Day 8

September 22, 2014 – Lingshi – Chebisa

This is a magical day and one of the easiest of all trekking days. Leaving Lingshi, you'll **gently climb** to reach another delightful village, **Goyok**, which is set right below a 984 foot cliff. Another hour's walk brings you to a **lovely little valley** with a **huge waterfall** at one end of Chebisa. The walk is leisurely with opportunities to linger. You'll camp by the side of the river.

Altitude 12,401 feet; Distance 7.5 miles; Time 4 – 5 hours.

Day 9

September 23, 2014 – Chebisa – Shomuthang

Today, you'll start with **quite a stiff climb** through high pastures up the **Gombu La Pass** (14,300 feet) before

dropping through forests of dwarf rhododendron – which at times can be slippery. You'll then head down to the camp which is situated near a riverbed. **This valley is one of the most beautiful on the Snowman Trek.**

Altitude 13,100 feet; Distance 10.5 miles; Time 6 hours.

Day 10

September 24, 2014 – Shomuthang – Robluthang

Today, it'll be at least three hours of climbing before reaching **Jare La Pass** (15,695 feet) where, once again, you'll get **stunning views of the Himalaya** including **Sinche La, Tiger Mountain**, and **Jitchu Drake**. You'll then drop steeply down a forest trail to the **Tsharjathang Valley**, where herds of **takin** (the national animal) and many yaks roam. You'll then cross a knee deep river (there may or may not be a bridge) before climbing up to **Robluthang** where you'll camp.

Altitude 13,451 feet; Distance 13.6 miles; Time 7 – 8 hours.

Day 11

September 25, 2014 – Robluthang – Lemithang

This is **one of the hardest days of the trek**. You'll climb slowly up to **Sinche La Pass** (15,977 feet) and be rewarded with stunning views of mountains, including the spectacular **Tiger Mountain** at the head of the valley. On a clear day, **practically all of the mountains on the northern border are visible**. Eagles, griffin vultures, blue sheep, and yaks abound in this area. You'll descend for some time until you reach camp which is a lovely spot by the riverbank.

Altitude 13,254 feet; Distance 8.5 miles; Time 6 – 7 hours.

Day 12

September 26, 2014 – Lemithang – Laya

Today, you'll **walk along the river**, one of the tributaries of the Mo Chu (Mother River), and through a **forest of rhododendron and silver fir** and then enter the village of **Laya**. The people of Laya are famous for their vertical stripe yak hair clothing and their strange conical bamboo hats. The women wear their hair long and with a great deal of turquoise and jade jewelery. The features of the people are even more **Tibetan/Mongolian** than the Bhutanese who live in the central valleys.

There are stunning views of the surrounding mountains. The afternoon may be spent at leisure or visiting village houses and chatting with villagers.

Altitude 12,729 feet; Distance 6.2 miles; Time 4 – 5 hours.

Day 13

September 27, 2014 – Laya

Today is a **rest day** in Laya with the opportunity to **meet the local people** and to visit nearby sights if you like. This village is located in a beautiful setting surrounded by **snowy mountain peaks**. It's possible to visit the local school here as well as the community's dzong.

Day 14

September 28, 2014 – Laya – Rodophu

Today, you'll have a relatively easy descent to **Tashi Makhang** army camp where there is a checkpoint. But from there, it's mostly **steep ascent**, through forest and muddy trails, to **Rodophu**. If the weather is clear you should have great views of the **Tsenda Gang group of mountains**.

Altitude 13,451 feet; Distance 10.5 miles; Time 6 – 7 hours.

Day 15

September 29, 2014 – Roduphu – Narethang

Today, you'll tackle the approximately **three-hour climb to Tsemo La Pass** (16,090 feet), which starts out with a gentle ascent and gets steeper closer to the pass. But from the pass you may be lucky enough to see the

spectacular **Gangla Karchung** as well as **Jitchu Drake** and **Jhomolhari**. You'll then descend and finally climb to **Narethang**, where you'll camp at 16,200 feet, **the first high camp on the trek**.

Altitude 16,200 feet; Distance 6.2 miles; Time 6 – 7 hours.

Day 16

September 30, 2014 – Narethang – Tarina

Today, you'll first **climb slowly up to the Karakachu La Pass** (16,465 feet) which will take two to three hours. At the pass, you'll be rewarded with **stunning views of Karakachu, Tsenda Gang, Jejekangphu, and Teri Kang**. The descent into the **Tarina Valley** is steep and long, perhaps taking 3.5 hours before hitting the valley floor (where herds of takin roam) and then an easier two to three hour walk to camp. It will be a **day of great views** of the surrounding mountains and lakes.

Altitude 12,795 feet; Distance 15 miles; Time 8 – 9 hours.

Day 17

October 1, 2014 – Tarina – Woche

Today will be a relatively short trekking day. During the early part of the day, you'll **follow a river** for about an hour before ascending up a steep muddy trail. There will then be a **stiff climb to reach camp near Woche**. This area is where the beautiful **Lunana** region begins.

Altitude 12,565 feet; Distance 7.5 miles; Time 5 – 6 hours.

Day 18

October 2, 2014 – Woche – Lhedi

Today, you'll climb gradually through **juniper forests** and then cross a river from where you'll have great views of **Jejekangphu**. A stiff climb then takes you past the **Yumtso and Setso lakes** and onward to **Kesha La Pass** (15,305 feet). It will take two to three hours to get to the pass. You'll then descend into **Tega Village** and finally back up a steep, short climb to reach camp at **Lhedi**.

Altitude 11,942 feet; Distance 9.3 miles; Time 6 – 7 hours.

Day 19

October 3, 2014 – Lhedi – Thanza

Today, you'll follow the Pho Chu through the **village of Lhedi**. You'll then climb upward for about 30 – 45 minutes to **Chozo Dzong**, which was built in the 17th century. After three or four hours, you'll reach the **beautiful villages of Dyotta and Thanza**, where you'll camp in a meadow with **views of Table Mountain** right in front of you.

Altitude 13,320 feet; Distance 9.3 miles; Time 6 – 7 hours.

Day 20

October 4, 2014 – Thanza

Today is another well-deserved **rest day** where you'll be able to explore the village and visit with the people of Thanza.

Day 21

October 5, 2014 – Thanza – Tshorim

Today's trek starts with a climb up to the ridge, from where there is a **great view of Table Mountain and Thanza Valley** below. You'll cross the ridge and enter a small valley with a stream running through it. You'll then follow the stream up the valley, enjoying the view of **snow-capped mountains**, and have lunch near the bridge. You'll then climb up out of the valley, crossing some small ridges to reach the **campsite at Tshorim** (16,814 feet).

Altitude 16,814 feet; Distance 11.8 miles; Time 8 – 9 hours.

Day 22

October 6, 2014 – Tshorim – Gangkar Puensum Base Camp

Today's trek is another highlight of the trip. The day starts with a short climb up to **Tshorim Lake**. You'll walk

around one side of the lake enjoying a panoramic view of the **Gopu La ranges**. Then, the final stretch up to **Gopu La Pass** (17,158 feet) is very short.

After crossing the pass, you'll descend to the base camp walking along the ridge and enjoying a great view of **Gangkar Puensum**. The group may then detour left and climb up a pyramid-shaped peak for a better view or go directly down to the base camp (16,305 feet) near the Sha Chu where camp will be set up.

Altitude 16,305 feet; Distance 10 miles; Time 6 – 7 hours.

Day 23

October 7, 2014 – Gangkhar Puensum – Geshe Woma

Today, you'll follow the trail along the Sha Chu, which descends gradually to **Geshe Woma**, where you'll camp.

Altitude 13,780 feet; Distance 8.7 miles; Time 5 – 6 hours.

Day 24

October 8, 2014 – Geshe Woma – Warathang

The trail continues along the course of the Sha Chu for two to three hours until the **stiff climb to Saka-la Pass** begins. Visibility is poor along this part of the trail, so you must keep watching the top of the ridge in order to stay on course. The group will stop for lunch near a **yak herder's camp**, then climb up to **Saka La Pass** (15,750 feet).

Here, there are **stunning views** on the descent to the lakes and another short ascent during which you'll see **small lakes spreading below towering mountain peaks**.

Altitude 13,125 feet; Distance 11 miles; Time 8 – 9 hours.

Day 25

October 9, 2014 – Warathang – Dhur Tsachu

A short half hour climb takes you up to **Juli La Pass** (14,435 feet). After crossing the pass, you'll descend to the river side through **dense rhododendrons, juniper, and conifer forests**. You'll then cross a bridge and after a short climb you'll reach **Dhur Tsachu hot springs** where legend has it Guru Padmasambhava (Rinpoche) bathed in the 8th century.

Altitude 13,750 feet; Distance 8.7 miles; Time 5 – 6 hours.

Day 26

October 10, 2014 – Dhur Tsachu – Tshochenchén

From the spring, it is a long steady climb upward, with great views of the **mountains in Lunana**. Eventually the ground levels out and you'll see several beautiful **deep blue lakes**, yaks grazing on the surrounding pastures and yak herder's camps.

Altitude 12,630 feet; distance 10 miles; Time 7 – 8 hours.

Day 27

October 11, 2014 – Tshochenchén – Dhur – Bumthang (end of trek)

Today is the last day of the trek! As such, the group will have to change back to using pack ponies. You'll set off **very early** in order to reach Bumthang before dark.

The path follows the **Chamkhar Chu** descending gradually with few climbs. The trek ends when you reach **Dhur village** where a bus will meet the group to drive you to Bumthang to check in to your HOTEL. Dinner and overnight at Rinchenling Lodge or similar in Jakar (Bumthang Valley).

Altitude 8,333 feet; Distance 13 miles; Time: 13 hours.

Day 28

October 12, 2014 – Bumthang sightseeing

After a well-deserved sleep-in, you'll continue **east toward the Bumthang Valley**, considered the seat of

Buddhism in Bhutan. Here, you'll have plenty of time to visit many of the region's wonderful sights including several temples such as: **Kurjey Lhakhang**, the **Tamshing Gompa** (monastery), **Jambay Lhakhang**, and the **Jakar Dzong**. If time permits, you might also visit the **Swiss Farm** where you can buy cheese, honey, beer, and local fruit spirits.

In the evening, there will be an opportunity to attend a prayer ceremony at **Karchu Dratsang** (the monastery of His Holiness Namkhai Ningpo). Dinner and overnight at Rinchhenling Lodge or similar in Jakar (Bumthang Valley).

Day 29

October 13, 2014 – Bumthang – Gangtey – Wangdue

After breakfast, you'll begin the drive back west toward **Paro**. You may stop at **Yotong La Pass** for a break and then continue onward through **Trongsa** and over **Pele La Pass**. Soon after, you'll turn south toward the **Phoblika Valley** (10'000 feet). This valley is considered to be the **most beautiful valley in all the Himalayas** (to those who haven't done the Snowman Trek!) and is the winter home to the endangered **black-necked cranes**. Lunch will be provided along the way.

Dinner and overnight at [Dewachen Hotel](#) or similar in Gangtey.

Day 30

October 14, 2014 – Wangdue – Thimphu

After breakfast, you'll continue the westward drive over **Dochu La Pass** (10,000 feet) to Thimphu. Lunch will be at a restaurant in Thimphu.

After lunch, you'll have a chance to visit numerous sights in this small city including: the **Institute of Traditional Medicine**; the **Folk Heritage Museum**; the **Textile Museum**; and the **Handicrafts Emporium** (for souvenirs and handicrafts). Dinner at a local restaurant and overnight at [Hotel Kisa](#) or similar in Thimphu.

Day 31

October 15, 2014 – Thimphu sightseeing – Paro

After breakfast, the group will visit the **National Library**, stocked with ancient manuscripts, and the Painting School where traditional arts and crafts are still kept alive. In the afternoon, you'll visit the **Dupthop Lhakhang**, one of the few surviving nunneries in Bhutan, and then the **Tashichho Dzong**, seat of the national government and the central monastic body. Other highlights include a visit to the **National Memorial Chorten**. There will be a final celebratory dinner and then overnight at [Bhutan Metta Resort and Spa](#) or similar in Paro.

Day 32

October 16, 2014 – Paro – Departure

Following breakfast, you'll leave for the airport for the sad farewell to the Kingdom of Bhutan and your flight to Bangkok. Flights usually arrive into Bangkok late in the afternoon (4:30 p.m. or later). Though you can connect with an international flight that night, you might consider staying in Bangkok for one night in case flights out of Paro are delayed (not uncommon).

**** Itinerary subject to change without notice.**