

Bhutan Festival Tour 2018 (no tour escort – English-speaking Bhutan guide only)

Itinerary dates: October 20 – October 30, 2018

HIGHLIGHTS

- * Hike to **Tiger's Nest**, the country's most photographed monastery
- * Attend two festivals in Bumthang where you'll see a variety of dancing and singing
- * Take light hikes in the **peaceful beauty of the Himalayan foothills**
- * Visit stunning **Punakha Dzong** – considered the most beautiful monastery in Bhutan
- * Walk through the Gangtey Valley, where **black-necked cranes** migrate from the Tibetan plateau

The group will depart from Bangkok on the morning of October 20th to Paro, Bhutan. Flights leave Bangkok very early on the morning of October 20th (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.

ITINERARY

Day 1

Saturday, October 20, 2018 – Arrive from Bangkok – Paro - Thimphu

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

You'll immediately enjoy the magnificent beauty of the region as soon as you arrive in Bhutan. On a clear day, spectacular vistas of the Himalayas, 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 after going through visa control and customs and then drive to **Thimphu**, Bhutan's capital (population 86,000; 7,520 feet) about 90 minutes away.

After lunch in Thimphu, you'll have a chance to visit the city's **weekend market**, filled with a wide variety of goods for both locals and tourists. Expect to see produce and meats for sale as well as souvenirs and clothes. Today you might also get a chance to see an archery tournament, which often take place at the local archery grounds.

Dinner and overnight at either Namgay Heritage in Thimphu.

Day 2

Sunday, October 21, 2018 – Thimphu

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, you'll enjoy a full day of sightseeing in Thimphu with a chance to learn about the local culture, arts and religion by visiting a number of sights. This might include the **National Memorial Chorten**, the **handicraft emporium**, the **School of Traditional Arts and Crafts** and the **National Zoo** (more like a preserve, the only animal there is the national animal, the extraordinary Takin).

Dinner and overnight at either Namgay Heritage in Thimphu.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Though **Thimphu** is considered a bustling city compared to the rest of Bhutan, it is the **world's only capital without a traffic light!** It is also a great place to learn about the nation's thriving **arts and crafts**.

Day 3

Monday, October 22, 2018 – Thimphu – Punakha

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, you'll depart for **Dochu La Pass** (10,000 feet), ascending steeply through pine and cedar forests with hanging lichen. You'll then take a short **downhill hike through the woods** and board your vehicle when you meet up with the road again. You'll then drive onward to the **Punakha Valley**. Lunch will be served at the hotel.

In the afternoon, the group will tour nearby **Punakha Dzong**.

Dinner and overnight at [Meri Puensum](#) in Punakha.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** **Punakha Dzong** is likely the most **beautiful of all dzongs** in Bhutan. You will have a chance to meander through this complex of **architectural structures** which are home to **hundreds of monks** half of the year. You'll see the magnificent main temple that contains **massive Buddhas** at the altar as well as **thousands of small statues** placed in the walls.

Day 4

Tuesday, October 23, 2018 – Punakha – Trongsa

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, you'll depart for the five-hour ride to **Trongsa**. You'll cut through the **Black Mountains** on Bhutan's "Central Road." This highway essentially opened central Bhutan to the rest of the world just over 30 years ago.

Along the way, you'll go through **Wangdue**, a small village and the district headquarters of Western Bhutan. The road then climbs through tropical vegetation to **Pele La Pass** (10,900 feet), surrounded by towering rhododendron and dwarf bamboo. You'll likely see **yak**, which often graze in this area and, if clear, you might see impressive **Mt. Jomolhari** (24,140 feet). Coming down from the pass, you'll continue on to Trongsa, where you'll visit the striking Trongsa Dzong.

Dinner and overnight at [Yangkhil Resort](#) in Trongsa.

Day 5

Wednesday, October 24, 2018 – Trongsa – Bumthang Valley – Festival Day

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, you'll journey eastward to the **Bumthang Valley**, an area rich with fantastic sights to see. Today is the start of the **Jambay Lhakhang Tsechu** (festival). Depending on your arrival time, you'll be able to have lunch at the hotel before attending the festival or go directly to the festival before lunch and

check in at the hotel later. You may also have time to visit the local monasteries include **Kurjey Lhakhang and Jambay**, the **Tamshing Gompa** and **Jakar Dzong**

Note that also in the area is a wonderful shop that produces **cheese, honey** and **local fruit spirits**. There is a **brewery** next door. If they are open during the festival and if you have time, there is the option of visiting the farm on this day or tomorrow.

Overnight at Rinchenling Lodge in Jakar (Bumthang Valley).

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** It's believed that **Buddhism in Bhutan started in Bumthang**. The valley is home to the two oldest temples in the Kingdom as well as a number of sacred sites. A spiritual vibe fills the air of this idyllic valley.

Day 6

Thursday, October 25, 2018 – Bumthang – Festival Day

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

In the morning, you'll have the chance to attend another festival! This one is the **Prakar Lhakhang Tsechu** and takes place at a different monastery nearby. You'll not only see many dances at these festivals but you'll also see **craftspeople** from around the country set up with booths to sell **jewelry, clothes, Buddhist treasures** and other souvenirs. On this day, you may also have time for sightseeing around the Bumthang Valley.

Note: if you are not interested in another festival, there is the option to go for a hike in either **Ura** or **Tang Valley** (where there is a nunnery).

Overnight at Rinchenling Lodge in Jakar (Bumthang Valley).

Day 7

Friday, October 26, 2018 – Bumthang – Gangtey

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, you'll start the drive back toward **Paro**. You'll have a chance to stop at **Yotong La Pass** and continue on via Trongsa, to Pele La Pass. From there it's onward to the **Phoblika Valley** (10,000 feet), deemed the most beautiful valley in the Himalayas. You'll have lunch along the way.

Dinner and overnight at Hotel Dewachen in Gangtey.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** The **Phoblika Valley** is the winter home to the endangered **black-necked cranes** which migrate from the **Tibetan Plateau**. While they are usually only here from November through March, sometimes there are some early arrivals around this time.

Day 8

Saturday, October 27, 2018 – Gangtey – Wangdue

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, you'll visit **Gangtey Gompa**, which was built in the 17th century and renovated just a few years ago. From the gompa, you'll **walk back to the hotel** along a path that cuts through a **beautiful forest** and then across the valley floor. Lunch will be served back at the hotel.

In the afternoon, you'll drive about two hours to a riverside hotel near **Wangdue** (4,000 feet) and enjoy some leisure time before dinner.

Dinner and overnight at Hotel Lobesa in Wangdue.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** You'll enjoy the morning's walk in the **Phoblika Valley** which is relatively easy. This region is **breathtaking** and you'll likely see horses and cows meandering around the valley floor that's ringed by **low mountain ranges**.

Day 9

Sunday, October 28, 2018 – Wangdue – Thimphu – Paro

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

From Wangdue, you'll drive onward to **Thimphu** where you'll have lunch at a local restaurant and one last opportunity for **sightseeing and shopping** in the capital. You will then head to Paro.

Dinner and overnight at Metta Hotel and Spa in Paro.

Day 10

Monday, October 29, 2018 – Paro

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

On this last full day in Bhutan, you'll get an early start in order to hike the two+ hours to **Tiger's Nest (Taktsang)**, the country's **most photographed and well-known monastery**. You'll **tour the few temples** at the top and have time to enjoy the view. You'll stop at the tea shop/cafe, located midway, where you'll have tea (or lunch, depending on the timing) and enjoy excellent views of Tiger's Nest up above.

Upon returning to Paro, you may have time for **relaxing or going to town** for last-minute souvenir shopping.

Final dinner and overnight at Metta Hotel and Spa in Paro.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** The hike up to and visiting **Tiger's Nest** could quite possibly be the highlight of your time in Bhutan! This iconic site, perched on the side of a mountain, is **revered by the Bhutanese** – and you'll soon see why.

Day 11**Tuesday, October 30, 2018 – Paro – Bangkok****Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

Following breakfast, you'll leave for the airport for 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.**

*****No refunds for unused portions of the tour.**