

Bhutan Women-only Festival Tour March/April 2025

Dates: March 27 – April 7, 2025

Trip Leader: Beth Whitman

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Hike to **Tiger's Nest**, the country's most photographed monastery
- Attend two festivals, including the popular Paro Festival and the smaller/intimate Talo Festival in Punakha
- Enjoy short 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 fly from Bangkok, Thailand to Paro, Bhutan very early on the morning of March 27 (7:30 AM). It's best to arrive in Bangkok at least 24 hours prior to departure to Bhutan in the event of flight delays.

We can suggest hotels in downtown Bangkok if you'd like to arrive in advance, or you can stay near the airport to make it easier on yourself the morning of our departure.

ITINERARY

Day 1

Thursday, March 27, 2025 – Bangkok – Paro – Thimphu

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Upon landing in Paro, we'll be met by our guide and driver for the start of our journey through this **pristine and peaceful kingdom**.

You'll immediately be struck by the crisp, clean air as you take in the scenery of this country that's located at the foothills of the Himalayas.

Our first stop will be a short drive away to the town of Paro for a **traditional lunch**.

After lunch, we'll begin our sightseeing with a visit to the **National Museum of Bhutan**. The building in which it's located dates back to the 17th century and was once a ta dzong (watchtower). It now holds artifacts including thangkas (Buddhist paintings), textiles, armor and other relics that help tell the history of the country.



If there's time, we may also visit **Rimpung Dzong** (literally translated as "fortress on a heap of jewels"), also built in the 17th century. But rather than a watchtower, this was built to defend the valley against Tibetan invaders.

From Paro, we'll make the one-hour drive to **Thimphu**, the only capital city with **no traffic lights!**

We'll get settled into our hotel and have a bit of time to relax in the late afternoon.

Dinner and overnight at [Capital Hotel](#) or similar in Thimphu.

Day 2

Friday, March 28, 2025 – Thimphu

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, we'll enjoy a full day in Thimphu, with a chance to learn about the **local culture, arts and religion** by visiting a number of sights.



We'll start at 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, clothes** and items such as **yak tail dusters, butter tea cups** and **jewelry** from Nepal and Tibet.

From the market, we'll visit the **National Memorial Chorten**, one of the most visited religious sights in Thimphu. This stupa was built in 1974 to honor the third king of Bhutan and stands out in the city with its golden spire and ringing bells.

We'll take a break for lunch before visiting the enormous **Buddha Dordenma statue**. This 170-foot-tall gilded Buddha is perched on a hill above the city atop a meditation hall. Inside the hall, there are **125,000 Buddha statues** that range between 6 and 12 inches tall—all glittering in gold.

Also, in the afternoon we'll have a chance to visit the **handicrafts emporium**, where **tapestries, crafts, jewelry** and **clothes** from around the country can be found, all in one location.

Dinner and overnight at [Capital Hotel](#) or similar in Thimphu.

Day 3

Saturday, March 29, 2025 – Thimphu – Punakha

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, we'll depart for **Punakha**, Bhutan's ancient capital, via **Dochu La Pass** (10,171 feet). We'll make a brief stop here to enjoy some tea and to also walk around the **108 stupas** built as a memorial for fallen Bhutanese soldiers killed in 2003 by Indian insurgents.

On a clear day, there are **spectacular views** of the Himalayan mountain range.

From the pass, we'll descend down a series of hairpin turns and drive onward to **Lobeysa**. Here we'll stop to make the short walk (about 20 minutes) to Chimi Lhakhang, the **temple of the divine madman**. The namesake "mad saint" is best known for his unorthodox methods of teaching Buddhism. Among other things, he used **singing, humor** and outrageous behavior that included **sexual overtones**.

Depending on our travel time, we'll have lunch somewhere along the way.

After our visit to the temple, we'll continue our travels east toward the **Punakha Valley** where we'll visit **Punakha Dzong**. This fortified monastery is considered the most **beautiful of all dzongs** in Bhutan.



We'll have the chance to meander through this complex of buildings, home to hundreds of monks during the winter while they are studying here. And we'll visit the magnificent main temple that contains **massive Buddhas** at the altar in addition to the **thousands of small Buddha statues** inset in the walls.

From here, we'll continue on to our nearby hotel.

Dinner and overnight at Bhutanic Resort or similar in Punakha.



Day 4

Sunday, March 30, 2025 – Punakha – Festival Day!

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, we'll head to nearby Talo Monastery to watch the **Talo Tshechu (festival)**. Perched high on a hill at just over 9,000 feet, this is an **ancient pilgrimage site** and one of the oldest monasteries in the country. We'll spend the day here and either have a picnic lunch or enjoy one at the event.

The festival itself is known for its mask dance as well as the atsara (clown) dance, performed by monks and laypeople.

You'll be mesmerized by both the attendees and the performers as they all will be wearing **colorful traditional clothing**.

Dinner and overnight at Bhutanic Resort or similar in Punakha.

Day 5

Monday, March 31, 2025 – Punakha – Gangtey

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, we'll continue our trip east and head toward **Gangtey**. Along the way, we'll pass through the small town of **Wangdue** before turning off the main road to the **Probjhika Valley**. This area is considered to be **the most beautiful valley in all of Bhutan**. It's here that the Royal Society for Protection of Nature is very active in protecting the habitat because black-necked cranes migrate here from Tibet in October and November.

We'll arrive in the valley in time for lunch at our hotel.

Afterward, we'll **take a hike** where we'll pass **farmhouses**, the village **monastery** and the **black-necked crane observation building**, before we cross the valley floor and then head up the small hill to **Gangtey Gompa**. This monastery, built in 1613, is surrounded by a village where you'll find the families of students at the **Pema Lingpa School for young monks**.

Dinner and overnight at [ABC Eco Lodge](#) in Gangtey.

Day 6

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 – Gangtey – Trongsa – Bumthang

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After an early breakfast, we'll head toward Bumthang via Trongsa.



The road winds its way up through tropical vegetation and over **Pele La Pass** (over 10,800 feet), where we'll stop for views of the snow-clad peaks, including that of Bhutan's sacred peak, **Mt. Jomolhari**.

Continuing on, we'll make another stop for tea/coffee at **Chendebji Chorten**, a stupa styled after **Swayambhunath** in Kathmandu.



While in Trongsa, we'll visit the inner courtyard of the historical **Trongsa Dzong**, the largest and one of the most impressive dzongs in Bhutan.

We'll have lunch at a nearby restaurant.

From Trongsa, we'll continue our drive towards **Bumthang** (another three hours away), crossing the **Yotong La Pass** (11,236 feet) before descending into Chumey Valley, the first of four valleys in the Bumthang area.

Before arriving at our hotel, we'll stop at the **Yathra Weaving Centre**, which represents the work of nearly 250 families living in the surrounding 13 villages.

It's then onward to **Jakar**, a small village at the center of the Bumthang Valley. This area is considered one of the most sacred in the country as it is considered the **birthplace of Buddhism in Bhutan**. It's here that kings were cremated and where the present royal family traces their ancestry back to the famous saint, Pema Lingpa.

Dinner and overnight at [Rinchenling Resort](#) or similar in Jakar (Bumthang Valley).

Day 7

Wednesday, April 2, 2025 – Bumthang Valley

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we'll have a full day of sightseeing in the area, home to the **two oldest temples in Bhutan**, as well as many other sacred sites.

We'll start with a visit to **Tamshing Monastery**, which is one of the oldest monastic schools. We'll also visit **Kurjey Lhakhang**, which is where Guru Rinpoche is said to have subdued a local demon. Legends say that the imprint of the demon's body is still in a local cave.

We'll also visit **Jambay Lhakhang** (built in the 7th century, it's one of the oldest temples in Bhutan) and **Jakar Dzong** (the valley's imposing fortress).

After lunch at a local restaurant, we'll take a walk through the **local village's main shopping area** and visit the **handicraft emporium**, which features many Bhutanese products.

Dinner and overnight at [Rinchenling Resort](#) or similar in Jakar (Bumthang Valley).



Day 8

Thursday, April 3, 2025 – Bumthang – Paro (by flight)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, we'll drive to the nearby domestic airport for our short **flight back to Paro**.

Upon arrival in Paro, we will be picked up by our (new) driver and head to lunch.

After lunch, we'll have some **free time** and can either check in to our hotel or visit any sights we might have missed during our first pass through here.

Dinner and overnight at [Metta Resort](#) or similar in Paro.



Day 9

Friday, April 4, 2025 – Paro – Festival Day!

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today will be another exciting festival day!

After breakfast, we'll drive the short distance to the entrance of the **Paro Dzong**. From here, we'll walk up to the monastery to join the **tshechu**. Similar to the one at Talo Monastery, this festival features **traditional dancers and singers** in masks who perform traditional folk songs. Much larger than Talo, there will be thousands of locals attending this festival, making it an

excellent place for **people watching and photography** as the locals are dressed in their **finest traditional clothes**.

We'll spend the day here and enjoy a packed lunch before returning to the hotel in the mid to late afternoon.

Dinner and overnight at [Metta Resort](#) or similar in Paro.

Day 10

Saturday, April 5, 2025 – Paro

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we'll get an early start in order to hike **Tiger's Nest (Taktsang)**, the country's **most photographed and well-known monastery**.

We'll take breaks along the way but expect the hike up to the main buildings (at 10,240 feet) to take more than two hours.

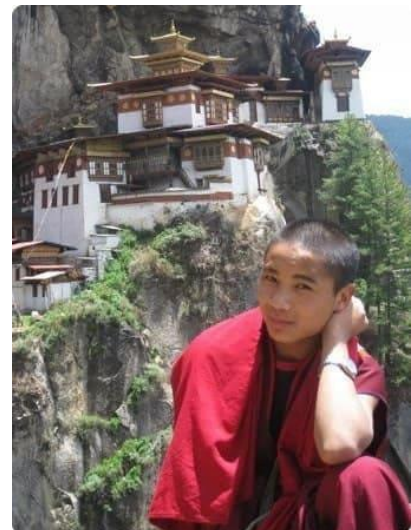
About halfway up, there is a cafe/tea shop, if you'd like to stop and wait for the group to return.

Once at the top, we'll **tour the few temples** here and have time to take in the stunning view.

On the way down, we'll stop at the cafe/tea shop for lunch and enjoy the **unparalleled views of Tiger's Nest** up above.

On our way back to Paro, we may stop at a couple more sights and/or go into town for some **souvenir shopping**.

Dinner and overnight at [Metta Resort](#) or similar in Paro.



Day 11

Sunday, April 6, 2025 – Paro

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today is a VERY exciting day!

We will wake up very early (around 2 AM) to go back to Paro Dzong for the **unfurling of a gigantic thongdrel** (applied tapestry) of Guru Rinpoche. The tapestry is more than 100 years old. It is unfurled against the side of a building and measures approximately 100 feet.



It's believed that witnessing this unfurling will **liberate you of negative karma**. (YAY!)

It's done in the dark and rolled back up before sunrise to prevent damage from sunlight.

We'll return to the hotel for some sleep before having breakfast.

After we eat, we'll take a drive to **Chela La Pass**. At 13,116 feet, it's the highest motorable pass in Bhutan. We'll enjoy the views here and, if the group would like, we can hike to a nearby nunnery.

We'll have lunch nearby the pass and then return to the hotel in the afternoon to rest and get organized for our flight tomorrow.

In the evening, we'll have a farewell dinner and overnight at [Metta Resort](#) or similar in Paro.

Day 12

Monday, April 7, 2025 – Paro – Bangkok

Meals: Breakfast

Following breakfast, we'll leave for the airport for our **flight to Bangkok**. Flights usually arrive into Bangkok late in the afternoon (4:30 PM 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).

If you'd like to overnight in Bangkok and would like suggestions for hotels in the city or near the airport, we'd be happy to provide you with some suggestions.

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