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Bhutan Women-only Festival Tour March/April 2025

Dates: March 31 – April 11, 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 31 (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 31, 2025 – Bangkok – Paro

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 thangkhas (Buddhist paintings), textiles, armor and other relics that help tell the history of the country.



We will then 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.

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

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

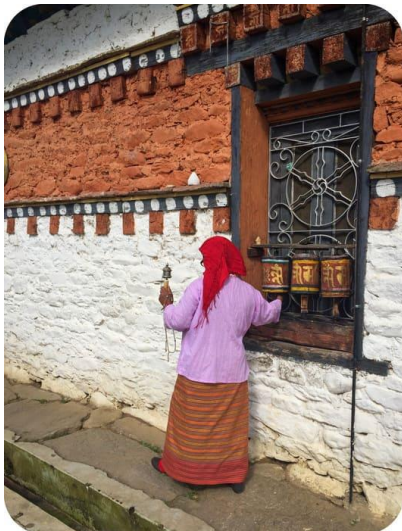
Day 2

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 – Paro – Bumthan Valley

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, we'll head back to the airport for our short **flight to Bumthang**, located in the central part of the country.

Upon arrival in Bumthang, we will be met by our driver and head to lunch at our hotel in **Jakar**, a small village at the center of the Bumthang Valley.



This area is considered to be **one of the most sacred** in the country as it is the **birthplace of Buddhism in Bhutan** and home to the **two oldest temples** in the country as well as many other sacred sites. It's here that kings were cremated and where the present royal family traces their ancestry back to the famous saint, Pema Lingpa.

We'll start our afternoon sightseeing 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).

In the late afternoon, we'll head to our hotel where you'll have a chance to take a traditional **hot stone bath** this afternoon or evening!

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

Day 3

Wednesday, April 2, 2025 – Bumthang Valley

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, after breakfast, we'll take a drive through the beautiful countryside before arriving in a village located in one of the **nearby valleys**. We'll take an easy **hike/walk through the area** along dirt paths and narrow alleys where the locals live to see their **traditional way of farming and living**.

We'll have a picnic lunch before heading back to Jakar, where our hotel is located.

Depending on the time, we may have a chance to 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 4

Thursday, April 3, 2025 – Bumthang – Trongsa – Gangtey

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, we'll continue our trip west and head toward **Gangtey**.

Our first stop will be the **Yathra Weaving Centre**, located not too far from Jakar. This center represents the work of nearly 250 families living in the surrounding 13 villages and is an excellent place to see (and purchase) a wide range of textiles.

We'll cross over **Yotong La Pass** (11,236 feet) before descending to the village of **Trongsa**. Here, 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 and then, heading east, we'll stop at **Chendebji Chorten**, a stupa styled after **Swayambhunath** in Kathmandu.



We'll then continue to the **Probjhika Valley**, where Gangtey is located. This area is considered **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 from Tibet migrate here in October and November.

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

Day 5

Friday, April 4, 2025 – Gangtey – Punakha

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today after breakfast, we'll tour the valley on foot. We'll **take a hike**, passing **farmhouses**, the village **monastery** and the **black-necked crane observation building**, before crossing the valley floor and heading 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 who attend the **Pema Lingpa School for young monks**.

We'll have lunch back at our hotel before we depart for **Punakha**, Bhutan's ancient capital. Along the way, 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**.

Before arriving in Punakha, we'll stop in the small village of **Wangdue**, where we will visit **Wangdue Dzong**, the third oldest fortress in the country. A fire destroyed the dzong in 2012 and it recently reopened after years of reconstruction.

We'll arrive at our hotel and have dinner and overnight at Bhutanic Resort or similar in Punakha.

Day 6

Saturday, April 5, 2025 – Punakha (Festival day!)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, after breakfast, we'll head to 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 have a packed lunch at the event.

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

You'll be mesmerized by 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 7

Sunday, April 6, 2025 – Punakha

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we'll spend the day sightseeing in the **Punakha Valley**. We'll start with a visit to **Punakha Dzong**. This fortified monastery is considered the most **beautiful of all dzongs** in Bhutan.

We'll meander through this complex of buildings where **hundreds of monks** live and study during the winter months. We'll also visit the magnificent main temple that contains several **massive Buddhas** at the altar in addition to **thousands of small Buddha statues** inset in the walls.



We'll have lunch at a nearby restaurant and then take an hour-long hike up to **Khamsum Yueley Chorten**. This stupa was built in 2004 in order to bring **peace to the world** and to clear obstacles for Bhutan.

We'll return to the hotel in the late afternoon and then have dinner and overnight at Bhutanic Resort or similar in Punakha.

Day 8

Monday, April 7, 2025 – Punakha – Thimphu

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today is a VERY exciting day!

We will wake up very early (around 3:00 AM) and return to the festival for the **unfurling of a gigantic thongdrel** (applied tapestry). The tapestry was created in the likeness of **Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel** (considered to be the unifier of Bhutan).

It is unfurled against the side of a building and it's believed that witnessing this unfurling will **liberate you of negative karma** (YAY!).

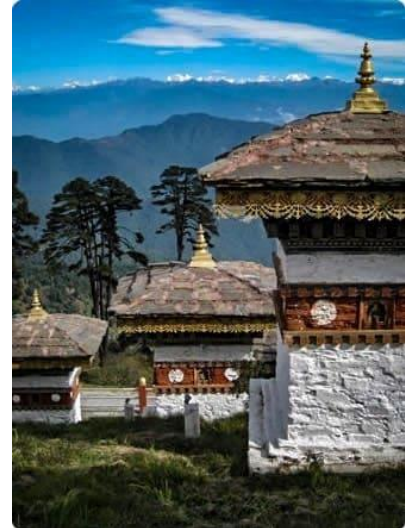
It's done in the early morning hours before sunrise to prevent damage from sunlight.

We'll return to the hotel for breakfast and a rest.

We'll then start making our way back east toward **Thimphu**.

Our first stop will be the village of **Lobeysa**. We'll have lunch before we 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**.

After our visit in Lobeysa, we'll stop at **Dochu La Pass** (10,171 feet) to enjoy some tea and 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.



By late afternoon, we'll arrive in **Thimphu**, the only capital city with **no traffic lights!**

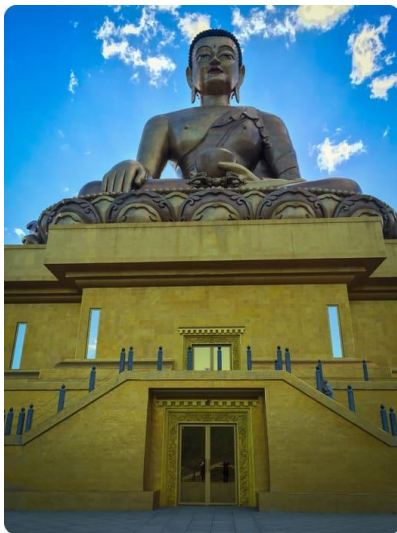
Dinner and overnight at Capital Hotel or similar in Thimphu.

Day 9

Tuesday, April 8, 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 sites.



We'll start with a visit to the **National Memorial Chorten**, one of the most visited religious sites 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. We can also take time to look for souvenirs in some of the local shops.

Dinner and overnight at Capital Hotel or similar in Thimphu.

Day 10

Wednesday, April 9, 2025 – Thimphu – Paro (Festival day!)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today will be another exciting festival day!

After breakfast, we'll drive to Paro to 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 **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 11

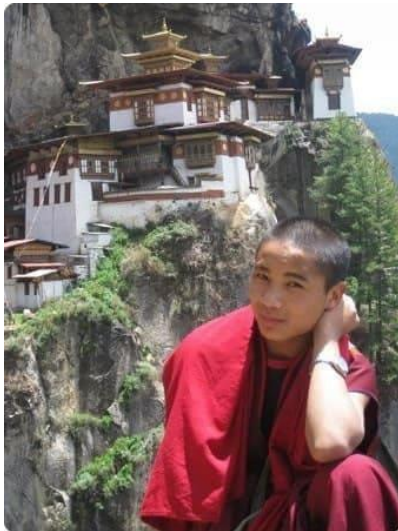
Thursday, April 10, 2025 – Paro

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**.

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

Day 12

Friday, April 11, 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 recommendations.

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