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Bhutan Women-only Fall Festival Tour October 2025

Dates: October 1 – 12, 2025

Trip Leader: Denise Kittleson

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Hike to **Tiger's Nest**, the country's most photographed monastery
- **Attend three festivals**, located in three very different regions of the country (Thimphu, Gangtey and Bumthang)
- 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 October 1 (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

Wednesday, October 1, 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 in 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

Thursday, October 2, 2025 – Thimphu (Festival day!)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, after breakfast, we'll experience our first **tshechu** (festival) of the tour!



The **Thimphu Tshechu** is one of the biggest festivals in the country, with **hundreds of performers and thousands of locals**—from both the city as well as the countryside—in attendance. Important as a social gathering for the community, these festivals **celebrate Buddhism, the country's primary religion.**

We'll take a break for lunch, but we will spend the day here, enjoying the **traditional music, singing and dancing** by both monks and laypeople. We'll see **elaborate costumes and masks** and enjoy the antics of some of the light-hearted performers.

We'll return to the hotel in the mid to late afternoon.

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

Day 3

Friday, October 3, 2025 – Thimphu

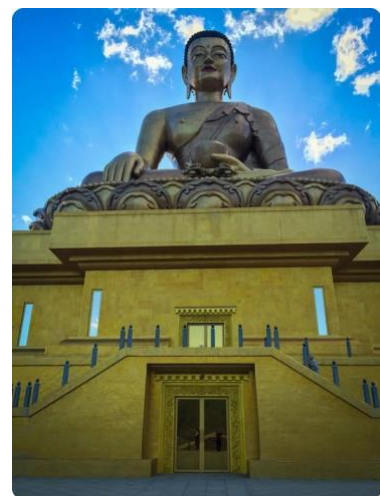
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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 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. It's a sight to see (and hear!) 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 4

Saturday, October 4, 2025 – Thimphu – Punakha

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, we'll depart Thimphu to make our way east. Our first stop will be **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.



From the pass, we'll descend a series of hairpin turns and drive onward to **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**.

We'll then head to the **Punakha Valley**, where we'll visit **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 dinner and overnight at Bhutanic Resort or similar in Punakha.

Day 5

Sunday, October 5, 2025 – Punakha – Gangtey

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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

Our first stop will be the small village of **Wangdue**, where we'll 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 continue east as 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 mountains, including that of Bhutan's sacred peak, **Mt. Jomolhari**.

We'll then turn off the main road to the **Probhika 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 at our hotel in time for lunch.

In the afternoon, we'll visit the monastery and **hike the nature trail** that overlooks the valley floor. This trail takes us down into the valley, where we'll pass **farmhouses**, the village **monastery** and the **black-necked crane observation building**.

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

Day 6

Monday, October 6, 2025 – Gangtey (Festival Day!)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, we'll attend the **Gangtey Tshechu (festival)**, held at the Gangtey Goempa (monastery). The monastery, built in 1613, is surrounded by a village where we'll find the families of students at the **Pema Lingpa School for young monks**.



The festival is held in the courtyard of the nearby goempa and features traditional **singing and dancing** by both men and women and includes monks and laypeople.

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

We'll head back to the hotel for lunch and a short rest, and then return to the festival in the afternoon.

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

Day 7

Tuesday, October 7, 2025 – Gangtey – Bumthang

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, after an early breakfast, we'll drive to Bumthang, home to the **two oldest temples in Bhutan**, as well as many other sacred sites.

Our first stop will be Trongsa. Here, we'll visit the inner courtyard of the historical **Trongsa Dzong**, the largest and one of the most impressive dzongs in Bhutan.

After a brief tour of the dzong and lunch, we'll make another stop at **Chendebji Chorten**, a stupa styled after **Swayambhunath** in Kathmandu.

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 checking in to our hotel, we will stop at the **Yathra Weaving Centre**, located just outside the Bumthang Valley. 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.

If we arrive in time, we may start our tour of the area 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).



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

Day 8

Wednesday, October 8, 2025 – Bumthang (Festival day!)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Following breakfast, we'll go to the **Thangbi Lhakhang Tshechu**, our third and final festival of the tour!

This will be similar to the other festivals, except it's quite special as it's located in **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 thought to be 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.

We'll either have a picnic lunch or return to the hotel for our meal. There will be plenty of time today to wander around the festival, shop for souvenirs from the many vendors and take in the atmosphere of this special event.

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

Day 9

Thursday, October 9, 2025 – Bumthang – Paro

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After 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 10

Friday, October 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.

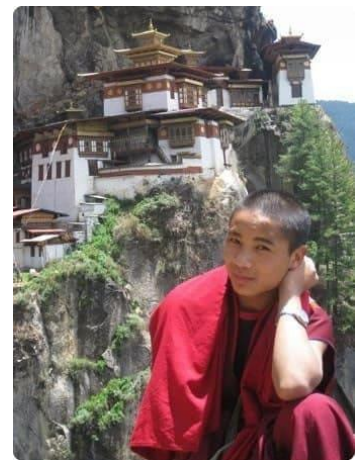
Once at the top, we'll **tour the few temples** here and have time to take in the stunning view.

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**.

We'll return to the hotel in the afternoon for a well-deserved rest.

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



Day 11

Saturday, October 11, 2025 – Paro

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, after breakfast, we'll drive to **Chela La Pass** (13,083 feet), the highest motorable point in Bhutan. There will be spectacular views of the Himalayas, including Mt. Jomolhari, on a clear day.

If you're ready for more exercise, you can take the **1 – 1.5 hour hike through a gigantic rhododendron forest**. You'll be rewarded with a visit to the Kila Nunnery, perched on the side of a hill.

We'll have a picnic lunch and then return to the hotel in Paro in the mid to late afternoon.



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

Day 12

Sunday, October 12, 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.**