

BHUTAN

Kingdom in the Himalayas

A Guided Walking Adventure





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Travel Style

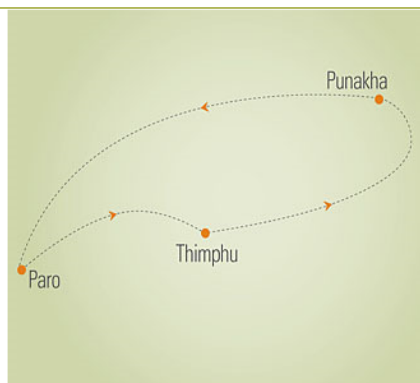
This small-group Guided Walking Adventure offers an authentic travel experience, one that takes you away from the crowds and deep in to the fabric of local life. On it, you'll enjoy 24/7 expert guides, premium accommodations, delicious meals, effortless transportation, and local wine or beer with dinner. Rest assured that every trip detail has been anticipated so you're free to enjoy an adventure that exceeds your expectations.

And, with our **new optional Flight + Tour Combo** and **Bangkok Pre-Tour Extension** to complement this destination, we take care of all the travel to simplify the journey. Refer to the attached itinerary for more details.

Overview

The small, landlocked country of Bhutan is rich with hospitality, deep traditions, and a passion for preserving the environment. The “Land of the Thunder Dragon” first opened its doors to tourism in 1974, and although it has since experienced a cascade of modernization, the Bhutanese have carefully maintained a clear national identity. The itinerary takes you to varying landscapes and elevations from mild and fertile rice-growing terraces to high ridges with views of the magnificent, snowcapped Himalayas. Your journey begins in Thimphu, the country's vibrant capital, where traditional customs and a modern vibe easily coexist in a wide river valley framed by mountains. Walking routes are along well-trodden footways between whitewashed farmhouses, villages, monasteries, temples, and *dzongs* (former fortresses). Next, you move to the fertile Punakha Valley where from Chelila Pass, at over 12,000 feet, you gaze on some of Bhutan's highest peaks, all rising over 22,000 feet. The tour culminates in the cultural center of Paro, where you walk up to the most famous monastery in Bhutan, “Tiger's Nest,” which is dramatically perched on the edge of a cliff.

You are warmly welcomed in simple but comfortable accommodations, where hospitality and local décor, are complemented by the surrounding scenery. “Gross National Happiness” defines the Kingdom's development goals, and perfectly captures the vibrant combination of Bhutan's medieval and modern histories, untouched mountaintops, and deep, fast-flowing rivers.





Daily Itinerary

DAY 1

Transfer from Bangkok to Paro to Thimphu. Walking tour of Thimphu; 3-5 miles, easy

The flight into this spectacular part of the world is like no other. The green wall of hills, known as *dooras*, is a gateway into Bhutan from the plains; the hills climb continually higher as you fly north toward the Tibetan border. Silvery rivers thread the valleys, waterfalls plunge down the forested mountainsides and, to the north, the great snowcapped peaks of the inner Himalayas rise up into the sky. Upon arrival, you are transferred to Thimphu. Once a rustic village, it is now the capital of Bhutan, and sits in a broad, fertile valley of the Wang Chu River. Compared to Paro and Punakha, Thimphu is a bustling city, although a relaxed one, with a population of only 50,000; it's the world's only capital without a single traffic light.

After checking into your hotel, you enjoy a traditional lunch before exploring Thimphu on foot. Your walk takes you among its many interesting sights; Thimphu Dzong (seat of the government and main monk body), the policeman directing traffic, a local archery match, crimson-robed monks, Indian laborers, and *gho*-clad (traditionally-dressed) professionals. Thimphu has a youthful

exuberance and a wonderful juxtaposition of the old and the new. Afterward, continue your quest for the perfect traditional weaving in local handicraft shops.

Returning to the hotel, you gather for an orientation meeting and welcome dinner of simple Bhutanese cuisine—selections include red rice, fresh asparagus, *momos* (dumplings), and, for those wanting a spicy option, there is *ema datsi* (cheese and chilis).

Hotel Druk (or equivalent), Thimphu

A comfortable hotel with a modern edge and extremely friendly service. Every part of the hotel's décor draws inspiration from various elements of the earth: water, air, fire, and sky.

DAY 2

Jigme Dorji National Park and Cheri Goemba; 3 miles, moderate with an elevation gain of 750 ft.

A short drive up the Thimphu Valley to the road's end at Dodena brings you to the entrance to Jigme Dorji National Park, one of Bhutan's revered wildlife sanctuaries. From here you cross the Thimphu Chu over a covered wooden swing bridge, adorned with hundreds of prayer flags. You then begin the ascent to Cheri Goemba, a small monastery perched on the hill with a view over the Thimphu Valley. This monastery was built in 1620 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the man responsible for many of Bhutan's most historic *dzongs* and monasteries. Here, he established the first Bhutanese body of Buddhist monks, and scattered across the hillside are many small meditation huts where the devout monks and their students can seclude themselves for extended periods of meditation. Take off your shoes and visit the tiny temples and shrines within the complex. Feel the spiritual atmosphere and ambience.

Following a transfer back to Thimphu and lunch at a local restaurant, you have the opportunity to visit the School of Traditional Arts and Crafts, the National Library, the Textile Museum, the Heritage Museum, and the Handicrafts Emporium, displaying the rich traditional crafts of the kingdom. Dinner this evening is Asian-Bhutanese cuisine at one of Thimphu's popular restaurants.

Hotel Druk (or equivalent), Thimphu



DAY 3

Transfer to Punakha. Temple of the Divine Madman; 4 miles, easy to moderate

The first stop, after approximately 1½ hours of driving, is at Dochula Pass at an elevation of about 10,000 feet, where, depending on the cloud cover, you may have initial views of the high mountains.

Here a short walk leads past rare Himalayan plants, flowers, and birds, especially in the spring, and perhaps even a grey langur or red fox may be spotted.

Punakha, situated at an altitude of 4,430 feet, served as the capital of Bhutan until 1955 and is still the winter capital for the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot) and the main monk body. Blessed with a temperate climate and fed by Pho Chu (male) and Mo Chu (female) rivers, Punakha is the most fertile valley in Bhutan. The climate allows for two rice crops per year, and is also suitable for growing fruit, with oranges, bananas, and guavas in abundance.

This afternoon you walk through a small village to Chimi Lakhang (the Temple of the Divine Madman). Lama Drukpa Kinley, more commonly known as the “Divine Madman,” is one of Bhutan’s favorite saints. He traveled throughout Bhutan and Tibet using songs, humor, and outrageous behavior to dramatize his teachings, believing that the stiffness of the clergy and social conventions were keeping people from learning the true Buddhist teachings. This site is still believed to hold fertility powers for women. From the vantage point of Chimi Lakhang, you take in the spectacular views of the Punakha Valley.

Punatsangchhu Hotel (or equivalent), Punakha

This hotel has a delightful location with views down the valley and over the river. It is decorated aesthetically in traditional Bhutanese style, every room with a balcony.

DAY 4

Chorten Nebu Temple; 6 miles, moderate with an elevation gain of 1,200 ft.

The walk this morning begins on a quiet country road, before climbing steeply over a rough trail as you make your way through terraced rice fields to the local Chorten Nebu Temple. Perched high on a hilltop with spectacular views of the

Mo Chu Valley below, Chorten Nebu is over 200 years old and houses the images of the future Buddha and the statues of Kagyupa monks, Guru Dorji Chang, and Mahakala. It is believed that long before the Chorten Nebu Temple was built during the time of the Divine Madman, this area was the meeting place of demons. One day when the Divine Madman passed by, he saw a meeting of all the demons and evil spirits. He picked up a burning piece of firewood, with which he was able to scatter them, never to be seen again. From the burning firewood grew the old oak tree, which still stands today near the temple. From this tree sacred talismans are made to adorn the necks or the belts of children and livestock to keep them healthy.



After lunch you continue descending through small villages. With magnificent views from the temple, it is easy to understand why many consider the Punakha Valley to be one of the most beautiful in Bhutan. Although steep in places, the trail from Chorten Nebu towards the valley floor is wide and well defined, as it is frequently used by local people visiting the temple, as well as children walking to and from school.

Punatsangchhu Hotel (or equivalent), Punakha

DAY 5

Khamsung Yuely Namgyel Temple to Punakha Dzong; 7 miles, easy to moderate

Following breakfast and a drive through the Punakha Valley, your walk begins with a series of switchbacks to the Khamsung Yuely Namgyel Temple. From the viewpoint at this majestic temple, you are afforded grand views of the Mo Chu River Valley below.

Your walk descends from the temple and follows a well-worn path down the valley through rice fields and small villages. Along the way are stunning views, with terraced rice paddies, providing a lush backdrop to the river below. You continue walking to the Punakha Dzong, which was constructed in 1637 and was the second of Bhutan's *dzongs* and for many years its seat of government. From this spectacular setting you can look back to see the Khamsung Yuely Namgyel Temple perched on the hillside far in the distance.



After a picnic lunch on the lawn of the temple, or perhaps in a local farmhouse, you continue with a short walk from the *dzong* to your waiting bus, and the return trip to the hotel. Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant where you can sample many traditional dishes.

**Punatsangchhu Hotel (or equivalent),
Punakha**

DAY 6

Optional Gangtey Valley Visit for Black Crane Festival (an approximate 6-hour roundtrip drive) November 6-15, 2016 Departure Only; or Talo to Punakha, 4-6 miles, easy to moderate

November 11, 2016 marks the annual **Black Crane Festival** and for those on the **November 6, 2016 departure**, you rise early this morning for a full-day visit to the incredible Gangtey Gumpa, also known as Phobjikha—an enormous glacial valley along the western slopes of the Black Mountains. This broad valley is a natural reserve for the endangered black-necked crane, of which only 300 to 400 remain in the world. This species is revered by locals as the “birds of heaven,” and they honor them with ceremonies of “welcoming” in November and “farewell” in early March. As a mark of respect for the cranes, the government decreed that no electric poles should ever be installed in the valley. Because the cranes feed on dwarf bamboo roots growing here, there are also restrictions on building and development in the valley. As the cranes flying overhead begin to circle down and return to their millennia-old wintering grounds, thousands of people gather, and local children dressed in crane costumes sing and dance to honor the birds. You will take a walk today along a valley trail which passes local farmhouses and affords many opportunities to meet the locals and interact with the children. After enjoying dinner in a local restaurant or farmhouse, you embark on the journey back to Punakha. It takes about three hours to return (total trip is 6 hours roundtrip), so it is a long day, but it is well worth the time spent on the road.

For those on all other departures (or for those who do not wish to travel to the Black Crane Festival), you will start your day with a 45-minute drive to the village of Talo, where you ascend on foot to the main temple enjoying panoramic viewpoints along the way, including vistas of the surrounding

countryside and the Wangdue Phodrang *dzong*, which burned down several years ago and is currently being restored using traditional Bhutanese craftsmanship (time permitting, you visit this dzong).

Next, you follow a series of switchbacks (making your descent relatively gentle) through area villages, where you may stop to visit a local school or farm. You continue through a chestnut forest, passing through the villages of Nobgang (the village of Bhutan's Queen Mothers) and Yuengu, stopping in the orchard of the Punakha Farm, where you enjoy a snack of fresh fruit salad and tea as you relax amongst the many varieties of trees, including bananas, figs, avocado, pear, and papaya.

After a well-deserved break, you continue on foot for another mile on the farm road reaching the Punakha Dzong where you meet the waiting vehicle and return to your hotel with time to relax before dinner.

Punatsangchhu Hotel (or equivalent), Punakha

DAY 7

Transfer to Paro. Royal Botanical Garden to Dochula; 6 miles, moderate

After leaving Punakha, en route to Paro, you enjoy a walk through a forest with temperate vegetation. Arriving at the Royal Botanical Garden, which is 8,800 feet above sea level, you take a short walk around the small lake, where you may spot a red panda, one of the rare animals in the Himalayas. After enjoying a visit through the gardens, you set off west towards the Dochula Pass. The trail takes you along switchbacks and under a canopy of trees where you may even spot an elusive pheasant. After walking for approximately two hours, you reach the pass and arrive at a small teahouse, where you enjoy lunch and a cup of tea. Meeting the coach here, you transfer to Paro, our last stop on this incredible adventure.

The Paro Valley is steeped in rich culture, scenic beauty, and hundreds of myths and legends. It is also home to many of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries, the country's only airport, and the National Museum.

After settling into your comfortable accommodations, there is time to relax before a dinner of local specialties in the hotel restaurant.





Tiger's Nest Resort, Paro (or equivalent)

This is a unique property and is the only resort surrounding Paro that has direct views of the famous Tiger's Nest. The comfortable rooms are designed in typical Bhutanese style and include all modern amenities.

DAY 8

Chelila to Kila Gompa; 7 miles, moderate to challenging with an elevation gain of 700 ft. (easier walking options available)

After breakfast, you board the bus for the 1½-hour drive that climbs almost 5,000 feet above the valley floor to the Chelila Pass, one of the highest automobile-accessible passes in Bhutan at over 12,000 feet. From here you view Mt. Chomolhari (24,000 feet), Mt. Tshering Gang (22,700 feet), and Mt. Jichu Drake (22,300 feet). The more challenging walking option begins here, with a steady hour-long ascent. For those who prefer an easier route, there are shorter walking options to a traditional spot for hanging prayer flags. Both groups meet for lunch, and then set off on the three-hour (mainly downhill) route. An approximate one-hour walk brings you to the base of Kila Gompa, where a meditation retreat center is perched on the edge of the cliff. There is ample time to visit the Kila Gompa nunnery, which is nestled beneath a craggy patch on the mountainside. The nuns here lead an undisturbed life of religious studies, prayer, and meditation. On departing this temple, you walk along an undulating trail that brings you to the rendezvous with the waiting driver who returns you to your hotel before another dinner of traditional Bhutanese cuisine.

Tiger's Nest Resort (or equivalent), Paro

DAY 9

Bhutan's National Museum to Taktshang ("Tiger's Nest"); 4 miles, challenging with an elevation gain of 1,650 ft.

This morning you have the opportunity to visit Bhutan's National Museum. Situated at the top of the hill above the Paro Dzong, the museum is located in what was originally the *dzong's* watchtower. It boasts an interesting collection of *thangkas* (painted or embroidered religious pictures), textiles, weapons, armor, household objects, and a rich assortment of natural and historic artifacts.

Following the museum visit, you walk to the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, Taktshang, perched on the side of a cliff, 2,800 feet above the valley floor. The 8th-century historical figure, Guru Rimpoche, is regarded as the second Buddha and believed to have had miraculous powers, including the ability to subdue demons and evil spirits. Taktshang is translated as "tiger's nest," and Guru Rimpoche is believed to have flown on the back of a tigress to the site of the monastery, where he then meditated in a cave for three months.

The well-traveled trail ascends a series of switchbacks through juniper and pine forests, leading you to a teahouse, which provides spectacular views of the Paro Valley below and the monastery above. You eat lunch here and follow the trail onward to a viewpoint at the same level as the monastery (approximately 9,950 feet). Conditions permitting, it may be possible to walk all the way into Taktshang, which is truly a highlight.

This evening a farewell dinner will be held in the hotel's restaurant, where you can chat with your fellow travelers about your wonderful Bhutanese adventure.

Tiger's Nest Resort (or equivalent), Paro

DAY 10

Departure from Paro

This morning your guide(s) accompany you to Paro Airport for your group flight to Bangkok, where you then bid farewell to your newfound friends.

ITINERARY CHANGES

Please bear in mind that this is a typical itinerary, and the actual activities, sites, and accommodations may vary due to season, special events, weather, or transportation schedules. We reserve the right to alter the itinerary, since tour arrangements are made up to a year in advance and unforeseen circumstances may arise that mandate change. Itinerary changes are made to improve the tour and your experience.

HIGH-ALTITUDE WARNING

The highest elevation you will be walking at on this tour is approximately 10,900 feet. The highest mountain pass you will drive over is 12,000 feet. The altitude may have some effect on travelers. Typical symptoms include nausea, a loss of appetite, insomnia, shortness of breath, dizziness, headaches, or other minor irregularities. There are actions you can take to help you adjust to the altitude, including drinking lots of water (more than you feel you need) and getting plenty of sleep. Also, take your time while walking, allow your body to adjust, and always keep your guides informed of how you are feeling. Please discuss with your doctor whether taking altitude medication would be helpful.

A WORD ABOUT ACCOMMODATIONS

As most accommodations in Bhutan are fairly basic, this tour includes simple properties which may not meet everyone's specifications. However, all hotels are guaranteed to be well located with regard to the walks and are comfortable with basic amenities, private bathrooms, and excellent service. If you have any questions or concerns about the accommodations on this tour we encourage you to call our office.

Further, due to Bhutan's strict tourism policy, the hotel itinerary is subject to change prior to your tour. The itinerary provided includes the hotels that you will most likely be staying at on tour; however this may be altered on the basis of availability. In the event of any changes, we will notify you at least one month prior to your departure.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Country Walkers is a leader in active travel with responsible tourism an integral part of our core values. Our tours reflect our dedication to best travel practices—and to the preservation of indigenous cultures and the environment. Country Walkers has made a donation on behalf of every traveler to the CW Travelers Fund, which supports designated projects in the communities and habitats in which we travel. We invite you to learn more about our efforts and initiatives for giving back.

Here's just one example that highlights our sustainable practices:

Punakha Rice Bank: Country Walkers makes a donation on behalf of every tour participant to a project called the Punakha Rice Bank, which is supported by VAST (Voluntary Artist Studio Thimpu). Poor farmers in Punakha have to borrow rice from wealthy farmers, but many of these poor farmers are not able to pay back the loan, as their annual production goes toward paying off the interest of the original loan. Through the Rice Bank project, the poor farmers are loaned rice without interest, therefore allowing them, over time, to not only pay back in full the rice they borrowed from the wealthy farmers, but also allowing them to pay back the rice they have been loaned from the Rice Bank. On this tour, you get a chance to walk through the village where this project is in action and to meet the farmers who are given support through this important initiative.

Tour Itinerary Overview

TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME

Druk Air check-in counter in the Departure Hall, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK), Thailand, two hours prior to the departure of the Druk Air flight to Paro, Bhutan

NIGHTS 1 & 2

Hotel Druk (or equivalent)

Thimphu, Bhutan

Tel 011 975 322 966

Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

NIGHTS 3, 4, 5, & 6

Punatsangchhu Hotel (or equivalent)

Punakha, Bhutan

Tel 011 975 238 0907

Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

NIGHTS 7, 8, & 9

Tiger's Nest Resort (Eye of the Tiger) (or equivalent)

Paro, Bhutan

Tel 011 975 171 10846

Email tigernestresort@druknet.bt

Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

TOUR DEPARTURE POINT AND TIME

Paro International Airport, Paro, Bhutan, in time for group flight to Bangkok

EMERGENCY CONTACT

One Call International

Email mail@oncallinternational.com

If communicating from within the US

Text 603.838.3169

Tel 800.555.9095

If calling from outside the US

Tel 800.555.9095 or 603.894.4710

When calling from outside the USA, you will need to dial the access code for the country you are calling from (a complete list of access codes, provided by AT&T, can be found on the Country Walkers website under Travel Tips and Travel Resources: International Access Codes).

In the unlikely event you are unable to connect by phone with One Call, or the region you are calling from does not have an access code, you should speak with a live international operator and ask them to place a collect call to 800.555.9095 or 603.894.4710.

Tour Facts at a Glance

TOUR LENGTH (WITHOUT FLIGHT PACKAGE)

10 days, 9 nights

DEPARTURE DATES (WITHOUT FLIGHT PACKAGE)

November 6-15, 2016

November 17-26, 2016

SCHEDULED GROUP PRICE, TOUR ONLY

\$5,998 (Single+\$498)

If you are interested in reserving the optional Flight + Tour Combo and pre- or post-tour extensions **for our scheduled group departures**, please refer to the attached itinerary for tour length, dates, pricing, and inclusions.

PRIVATE TOUR-ONLY PRICE FROM

4-5 guests: from \$6,198 (Single+\$498)

6+ guests: from \$5,998 (Single+\$498)

This private tour is available daily, on request, from March 1 through November 15.

TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME

Druk Air check-in counter in the Departure Hall, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK), Thailand, two hours prior to the departure of the Druk Air flight to Paro, Bhutan

TOUR DEPARTURE POINT AND TIME

Paro International Airport, Paro, Bhutan, in time for group flight to Bangkok

ACTIVITY LEVEL

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, with a rating of moderate, and an average mileage of 4 to 7 miles per day, with some steep ascents and descents. A variety of walks are included, ranging from easy town walking to more strenuous climbs of up to two hours. Please keep in mind when preparing for this tour that it takes place in the Himalayas, and therefore hilly terrain is

unavoidable. One walk, although optional, is considered to be challenging as it has a steep ascent and the trail can cause vertigo for those who are susceptible.

INCLUSIONS

- » Two expert, local guides (for groups of 8 or more), with you 24/7
- » All meals included; local wine or beer included with dinner
- » All accommodations while on tour
- » Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point
- » Mandatory internal airfare of \$995
- » Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary
- » Bhutan visa (you will receive the visa in the Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport prior to the Bangkok to Paro flight)
- » Destination information (weather, visa requirements, etc.) and other travel assistance available 24/7 provided by One Call International
- » The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the Country Walkers staff

LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN

Prior to your adventure you will be asked to sign a Guest Acknowledgment of Risk and you will receive:

- » Luggage tags
- » List of travel companions and guide biographies

GRATUITIES

Gratuities for all hotels, meals, and services that are included in your tour price will be paid by Country Walkers. Should you wish to tip your Country Walkers guide(s), the standard in the industry ranges from \$10 to \$15 per person, per guide, per day (or \$20 to \$30 per couple, per guide, per day), and can be paid in USD or local currency.

Traveling To and From Your Tour

If you are interested in reserving the **new optional Flight + Tour Combo** and **pre- or post-tour extensions**, please refer to the attached itinerary for more details.

TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME

Druk Air check-in counter in the Departure Hall, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK), Thailand, two hours prior to the departure of the Druk Air flight to Paro, Bhutan.

The flight from Bangkok to Paro is always scheduled to depart in the very early morning of Day 1 of the Tour Itinerary (usually around 5:00 – 6:00 a.m.). However, because our confirmation materials are finalized so far in advance, we will update you on the exact time of departure approximately 45-60 days prior to the tour. If you are not reserving the optional Flight + Tour Combo, please book your flights into Bangkok the day before the tour begins.

For all guests, a Country Walkers guide will meet you at the Druk Air counter in order to give you your flight tickets to Paro and your Bhutan visa. The guide will then accompany you on the flight to Paro.

MOST CONVENIENT AIRPORT

Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK), Bangkok, Thailand
airportsuvarnabhumi.com

PRE- AND POST-TOUR ACCOMMODATIONS

If you are not reserving our optional Flight + Tour Combo, you may wish to spend more than one night in Bangkok prior to your departure for Bhutan as this will allow time to explore this fascinating city, and will also allow for any delays with flight connections. The following hotel is most convenient for the night immediately preceding or following the tour as it provides a complimentary airport shuttle or you can get to the hotel on foot via a walkway (a 10-minute walk). Reservations can be made for a post-tour stay as well. Please contact the hotel directly to make your reservation. Rates vary by season and room type but start at approximately \$150 USD, including taxes but not breakfast.

Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel

Samutprakarn 10540 Bangkok

Tel 011 66 2 131 1111

Fax 011 66 2 131 1188

Email reservation@novotelsuvarnabhumi.com

novotel.com

DELAYS AND LATE ARRIVALS

If you are delayed or miss the scheduled group meeting point for any reason, we kindly request that you contact our emergency assistance provider, One Call International. This service is available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week to assist you with any type of travel delay. Please refer to the Emergency Contact details on your Tour Itinerary Overview page for One Call International contact details.

TOUR DEPARTURE POINT AND TIME

Paro International Airport, Paro, Bhutan, in time for group flight to Bangkok

Your Country Walkers guide(s) will escort you to Paro International Airport in time for the Druk Air group flight to Bangkok.

Please note: Your return flight is scheduled to depart Paro on the morning of the last day of your tour, typically between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and arriving late afternoon/early evening to Bangkok. If you are not reserving the optional Flight + Tour Combo, we suggest that you do not schedule any connecting flights this day from Bangkok and spend the night in Bangkok on the final day of the tour in case there are any flight delays from Bhutan. If absolutely required, a minimum of 4 hours is recommended for any international flight connections so onward flights from Bangkok should not be booked prior to 10:00 p.m. or 11:00 p.m.

Information & Policies

GUARANTEED DEPARTURES

Country Walkers guarantees the departure of every tour*—no exceptions and no disappointments! From the moment you make your deposit, you can start preparing for your adventure. We take care of all the details to ensure a seamless, small-group experience (with an average of 6 or 7 guests per guide). For best availability, reserve your trip today!

**except in cases of force majeure*

RESERVATIONS

Reservations for this tour may be made by calling Country Walkers at 800.464.9255. We can confirm your reservation with a deposit of \$350 per person. Final tour cost is due 90 days prior to tour departure date. As arrangements are confirmed at least a year in advance, the tour price is subject to change.

GUEST RESPONSIBILITIES

Each guest has the responsibility to select a trip appropriate to his/her abilities and interests and to prepare for the trip by carefully reading the confirmation materials. To join this trip, you must be in good health and capable of completing activities as described in the day-to-day itinerary. Our in-house experts welcome the opportunity to discuss the tour in more detail. In order to meet your needs, we ask that you please share any relevant physical limitations or health conditions when you make your reservation.

CANCELLATION POLICY

Cancellations received 91 days or more prior to the tour start date will incur a loss of \$150; cancellations received between 90 and 61 days prior to the tour start date incur a loss of 25 percent of the tour price; there are no refunds within 60 days of the tour start date. Up to 91 days prior to departure, you may transfer your reservation, depending on availability, from one departure to another in the same calendar year at no cost*. Please notify us in writing.

**One transfer per year; afterwards a modest per person transfer fee will apply. Please note that tours with seasonal prices may involve a higher price.*

TRAVEL INSURANCE

We offer guests the opportunity to purchase a Travel Protection Plan. Please contact us for details.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Air or other travel arrangements to and from your tour are not included in the price of your trip. We encourage you to contact your local travel agent, or Better Travel, a Vermont-based agency (800.331.6996 or bettertravel@madriver.com), for any additional air, hotel, rail, or transfer arrangements you may need.

Bhutan at a Glance

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

U.S. citizens: Passports are required and must be valid for at least six months beyond the dates of travel. Visas are required.



Important

Your visa for Bhutan will be arranged by Country Walkers and documents to finalize your visa will be given to you at the Druk Air counter at the Bangkok Airport by your guide. **At least 60 days prior to departure, Country Walkers requires a very clear, color copy of your passport identification page.** We recommend (to obtain the clearest copy possible) that you scan and email a copy to us. The visa will be stamped in your passport when you arrive at the airport in Paro, Bhutan, and will be valid for six months from the date you enter Bhutan.

Travel Tip

For traveling to and from Bhutan, have a variety of options: ATM card(s), credit card(s), and some dollars to exchange.

For more information, see travel.state.gov.

CURRENCY

Bhutan uses the Bhutan ngultrum (BTN). For up-to-date exchange rates, see oanda.com.

Always contact your bank or your credit-card company for details on fees and card use when traveling.

Important

- » The Indian rupee (INR) is also widely accepted within Bhutan as a form of currency. Indian rupees can be obtained in Bangkok. Bhutan ngultrum can be obtained upon arrival in Bhutan.
- » U.S. dollars in cash are always accepted for exchange. We suggest that you carry part of your traveling funds in U.S. dollars in the case of an emergency. Make sure the bills are not torn or dirty, as banks will not accept these and your cash will be useless. Cash should also be carried in small denominations (\$5, \$10, \$20 bills), as change is hard to come by in the villages.
- » ATMs are available in Thimphu and Paro, but these are not entirely reliable, so please be prepared with cash prior to departing Bangkok.
- » Visa is more widely accepted than MasterCard or American Express.

TIME ZONE

Bhutan is 10 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. Bangkok is 11 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. For more information on worldwide time zones, see worldtimezone.com.

PHONE & INTERNET

Bhutan country code: +975

Cell phone coverage throughout Bhutan is extensive, but cannot be guaranteed to be accessible on all American mobile carriers or to function at all times while on the trail or in remote areas. For more information regarding international phone use, please refer to countrywalkers.com/phones.



Internet access is generally very good in towns and villages; however, it is not guaranteed at all of the hotels used on the tour. For more details regarding Wi-Fi availability, please refer to the Tour Itinerary Overview.

LANGUAGE

The national language of Bhutan is Dzongkha, “the language of the *dzong*,” and belongs to the Tibetan family of languages. It is, however, sufficiently different that Tibetans cannot understand it. Originally spoken only in western Bhutan, Dzongkha is now the official national language, but numerous languages and dialects are spoken in Bhutan. English is also commonly spoken in the main towns, and is the medium of education in schools throughout the Kingdom.

While knowledge of the local language is not necessary, your guide can provide assistance, or see the enclosed Reading Guide for a suggested phrase book. Resources are also available at a Bhutanese governmental site dedicated to Dzongkha: dzongkha.gov.bt/index.en.php.

Travel Tip

- Bringing your own hair dryer or other electrical device? You'll need a travel converter, available at most hardware, travel, or consumer electronic stores.
- For laptops or an electronic device with a dual voltage switch, you'll need the adapter plug but not a converter.

ELECTRICITY

Alternating current of 230V and 50Hz is used in Bhutan. Plugs have two prongs in a variety of sizes. For a full listing of electrical outlets worldwide, see electricaloutlet.org.

WEATHER

The best times to visit Bhutan are in the spring and autumn. In spring, wildflowers are in bloom and birds are abundant; in autumn, skies are generally clear and the high mountain peaks are visible in the morning from passes and other vantage points. You can expect daytime temperatures to be very comfortable for

walking, and evening temperatures to be cool. Average temperatures (high/low) in Thimphu during November are 64/41, in Punakha, 72/55, and in Paro, 57/34.

Travel Tip

Please note that when searching weather websites on the Internet for temperatures just before you leave for the tour, these sites sometimes give information about the weather on the opposite side of the Tibetan Plateau, which is significantly colder than the areas you will visit.

However, if you would like to search for up-to-date forecasts for Bhutan we recommend qwikcast.com. For historical average temperatures and rainfall, see weatherbase.com.

HEALTH CONCERNS

No immunizations are required to enter Bhutan. Always consult a travel clinic at a local university, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, and/or your personal physician for the most up-to-date recommendations and routine vaccinations. Malaria medication, hepatitis, tetanus, typhoid, polio, measles,

mumps, and rubella vaccinations are generally recommended for all travelers. For the threat of malaria, you should consult the CDC or your physician for the most current information. Importantly, plan ahead for immunizations because some require administration several months prior to departure. The CDC provides the most current medical requirements and recommendations. Recommendations change frequently, so you must check directly with the CDC, a travelers' clinic, or other medical authority. See cdc.gov/travel or telephone 877.394.8747.

FOOD & DRINK

Traditional Bhutanese delicacies are rich with spicy chilis and cheese. The traditional dish, *ema datsi*, features large green chilis as a vegetable, not a spice, in a cheese sauce. Other typical Bhutanese dishes are *kewa datsi* (potatoes with cheese sauce), and *bja sha maroo* (chicken in garlic butter sauce). One dish that is frequently available is *daal bhat*, a Nepalese dish that combines rice and lentils. Several Tibetan-style dishes are common and one of the more popular is *momos*, dumplings filled with meat or vegetables. The food here is plentiful, delicious and hearty, but there is not a huge variety. Please remember that Bhutan is a relaxed culture and service is usually much slower than that to which Westerners are accustomed. Vegetarians can be accommodated in Bhutan; however, the vegetarian options are limited and not very imaginative. Soy-based products are rare. We recommend that vegetarians bring protein supplements or bars.



Food tips: We recommend following the simple rule, “If you can’t peel it, don’t eat it.”

Water: We advise that you drink only bottled water, including for ice cubes in drinks and brushing your teeth. Bottled water is widely available.

LIFE IN BHUTAN



Shopping and banking hours

Shops and stores are generally open 7 days a week between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., but hours and days may vary locally.

Banks are open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Mealtimes

Breakfast is served at hotels from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. In restaurants, lunch is served from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. and dinner is usually served from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Tipping

Bhutan does not have a tradition of tipping, therefore it is entirely at your discretion.

Personal safety

Crime is rare in Bhutan, especially compared with other countries in the region; however, please use common sense and exercise normal personal safety precautions that apply in many countries and cities worldwide. Please follow accommodation and/or tour representative guidelines about securing valuables.

Travel Tip

Rich in Buddhist traditions, Bhutan's 13 traditional arts and crafts—known as *Zorig Chusum*—have been codified since the 16th century. They are: (1) *Shing zo*, woodwork; (2) *Dho zo*, stonework; (3) *Par zo*, carving; (4) *Lha zo*, painting; (5) *Jim zo*, sculpting; (6) *Lug zo*, casting; (7) *Shag zo*, wood turning; (8) *Gar zo*, blacksmith; (9) *Troe zo*, ornament making; (10) *Tsha zo*, bamboo work; (11) *De zo*, paper making; (12) *Tshem zo*, tailoring, embroidery and appliqué; (13) *Thag zo*, weaving. For more information, visit tourism.gov.bt/about-bhutan/about-bhutan/arts-crafts.

TRAVEL RESOURCES

National Bhutan tourist board official site
tourism.gov.bt

Travel in Bhutan

A wealth of travel information is available at tourism.gov.bt.

Public holidays

Bhutan has several annual local festivals. For more information, see tourism.gov.bt/calendar.

TRAVELING IN BHUTAN

All visitors to Bhutan travel with organized tours, which provide ground transportation between regions in private minivans and cars. There are no internal flights or railway system. The road infrastructure is limited, therefore public buses are not convenient.

Airports

All international flights arrive at Paro's international airport on Bhutan's national carrier, Druk Air: drukair.com.bt/PG_Home.aspx.



Travel Tip

Travel to Bhutan requires patience and an open mind to cultural differences. Our tour takes you to diverse and sometimes remote regions. The most apparent difference may be in punctuality. The pace may be significantly slower than what you are accustomed to, especially in terms of service at hotels and in stores. Your respect for, and appreciation of cultural differences will enhance your enjoyment of this tour. For example, when meeting someone for the first time, smile and say *kuzo zangpo la*, which simply means “hello”. In the event that you meet a high level official, please be formal. Any proper etiquette will be observed by your guides. VIPs in Bhutan do not expect special treatment from guests. Please be aware that hats and tank-top style shirts are not allowed when visiting temples or *dzongs* in Bhutan.

Bhutan has adopted a development path of “Gross National Happiness” for the country’s future growth, taking into account not only economic development, but also environmental preservation and cultural considerations.

Packing List

PACKING TIPS

Pack light! Keep in mind there will be times you may have to carry your own luggage short distances, especially before and after your Country Walkers tour. Due to space constraints, we require you to limit your luggage to one medium piece (approximately 18x15x29 inches) and one small carry-on, per person (maximum size of 17.5x13.5x8 inches). We recommend packing any personal necessities, medications, your hotel itinerary/emergency contact information, your hiking boots (or shoes), and extra clothes in your carry-on luggage in the event that your baggage is delayed. We suggest leaving valuable jewelry at home. A copy of your passport or other important documents should be kept in a separate area of your luggage. Always be alert when carrying a purse, camera, money belt, or backpack in busy cities, airports, and train stations.

FOOTWEAR

- » Hiking boots. There are many brands to choose from. Proper fit is crucial, so try on new boots while wearing socks you plan to use on tour. Be sure to break in new footwear well before your tour begins. By the time you're ready to join your walking tour, you should be able to complete 4-7 miles of walking without discomfort. We require lightweight boots with proper ankle support and good tread to ensure stability on all types of terrain. Waterproof footwear keeps feet dry in heavy rain and water resistant footwear keeps feet dry in heavy dew. Country Walkers reserves the right to deny participation to any guest not wearing appropriate footwear.
- » Synthetic, moisture-wicking socks (cotton socks are not recommended for walking as they will quickly cause blisters)
- » Blister remedy

CLOTHING

- » Lightweight, wash-and-wear long pants
- » Long-sleeved, wash-and-wear shirt
- » T-shirts and shorts
- » Polar fleece or light wool pullover (it will keep you warm even when wet)
- » Dinner attire: dress is smart casual

- » Temple and dzong attire: shorts and sleeveless tops are not permitted when visiting most temples and dzongs in Bhutan. Convertible zip-off pants are a good option for both men and women on days that combine hiking and temple visits. Women may carry a light scarf, shawl, or jacket to cover bare shoulders and upper arms when needed.

OUTERWEAR

- » Waterproof rain gear: jacket, pants, hat, or hood
- » Windbreaker with hood (your rain gear may be suitable)
- » Hat with a broad brim or visor for sun protection
- » Warm hat or ear protection, polar fleece is ideal
- » Lightweight gloves (polypropylene; but heavyweight in case of variable weather, if you are particularly sensitive to cold)

EQUIPMENT

- » Pack (minimum size of 25L): large enough to carry water, extra clothing, rain gear, and personal items (camera, etc.)
- » Waterproof cover for pack
- » Water bottle, canteen, or CamelBak-type water reservoir or hydration pack to carry your own water while walking (equivalent of 1-2 liters)
- » Sunblock and lip balm
- » Insect repellent
- » Sunglasses
- » Toilet kit for when facilities are not available on the walks. Include zip-lock baggies, tissues, and moist towelettes, which can be disposed of upon return to the hotel
- » Personal first-aid kit including any medications you ordinarily take (in their original container)

OPTIONAL

- » Telescopic walking sticks (Please note that while telescopic walking sticks are recommended for this tour, they are not provided by Country Walkers. Therefore, please plan on bringing your own should you wish to use them.)
- » Binoculars

- » Camera and charger and/or extra batteries
- » Zip-lock bags (to keep camera and valuables dry)
- » Small notebook and pen
- » Field guides (see enclosed reading list)
- » Folding umbrella
- » Bandana
- » Washcloth (many Bhutanese hotels do not provide them)
- » Hand sanitizer and/or moist towelettes
- » Alarm clock (not all hotels have alarm clocks or provide wake-up calls)