

## DAY 1 - Your Journey Begins

Board your overnight flight to Europe (not included).

## DAY 2 - Arrive Paro – Thimphu

Welcome to Bhutan! Descend through the clouds past some of the world's highest glacial peaks, forested hills and the silvery Paro river snaking along the valley below. After a traditional welcome, you are transferred from Paro Airport to the capital of Thimphu. Join your Tour Director to visit the Memorial Chorten, Government Handicrafts Emporium and Trashichhoe dzong, “fortress of the glorious religion”. Tonight enjoy a Welcome Reception, drinks and dinner.(Welcome Reception and Dinner)

## DAY 3 - Thimphu Sightseeing

Thimphu is an exciting blend of tradition and modernity. Sightseeing includes ancient Bhutanese architecture at Simply Bhutan, the Textile Museum and the National Library, housing an extensive collection of priceless Buddhist manuscripts. Continue to the Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as the Painting School) where students undergo a six year training course in Bhutan's traditional arts and crafts. After lunch, meet the local artists at the Voluntary Artists Studio and observe weavers and embroiderers at work at the Royal Textile Academy. Next drive to Changangkha Lhakhang, a fortress like temple and monastic school perched on a ridge above Thimphu. Finally, come face to face with the Takin - the rare and bizarre national animal of Bhutan.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

## DAY 4 - Thimphu – Gangtey

Head east through the mountains and across the Puna Tsang Chu (Sankosh River) at Wangdue Phodrang to reach the beautiful Phobjikha Valley. Nestled in the surrounding slopes, visit the great Gangteng Monastery, established in the 17th century, where you can watch the monks study and create beautiful works of art. Admire the views before returning to the valley floor, famous for its black necked cranes, which migrate from the arid plains of Tibet each winter. Head for your hotel where you have time to relax amid the tranquil surroundings and mingle with the villagers - perhaps try your hand at traditional Bhutanese weaving.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

## DAY 5 - Bumthang

Today's drive is through the very heart of Bhutan to Bumthang, the general name given to the combination of four valleys – Chumey, Choekhor, Tang and Ura. Home to many of prominent Buddhist temples and monasteries, the "beautiful field" of Bumthang is recognised as the spiritual hub of the nation, steeped in folklore and tradition. You are free to relax this evening.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

## DAY 6 - Bumthang Sightseeing

Today, visit the Jakar Dzong and Kurjey Lhakhang complex, where the body imprint of Guru Rinpoche is still preserved in solid rock. Nearby, visit the 7th century Jambey Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's earliest temples. Across the river stands Tamshing Lhakhang, built by Saint Pema Lingpa and remarkable for its original statues and frescoes. Time also to explore the village, browse in the handicraft shop or relax at a local restaurant. Now onto the Swiss Farm, home to Bhutan's only

commercial cheese factory and where the local Red Panda beer is brewed. Then put your culinary skills to the test under the expert guidance of a team of local chefs at a special Bhutanese cooking class. Learn how to prepare local Bhutanese delicacies, laden with spices and seasoned with fiery red chillies!(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

#### DAY 7 - Ura Valley Experience

After a restful night's sleep, embark on an excursion to the Ura Valley. Climb up through open countryside to cross the Ura-la-pass (3,600m) with a magnificent views of Mt Gangkar Puensum. Above Ura village is a new temple dedicated to Guru Rinpoche. Inaugurated in 1986, it contains a huge statue of the master and remarkable paintings of the cycle of his teachings.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

#### DAY 8 - Punakha

After breakfast, drive to Punakha. After checking into your hotel, you are invited into a traditional farm house for tea or coffee with a local family, a unique glimpse into the daily lives of the locals. The rest of the day you are free to relax or explore.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

#### DAY 9 - Punakha Sightseeing

Set in a lush tropical valley, Punakha was Bhutan's capital until 1955. Visit the majestic 'Palace of Great Happiness' (Punakha Dzong) site of the coronation of the country's first king and full of gold Buddhas and red-robed monks. In the afternoon, there is a short hike across fields and roads lined with prayer flags to the temple of the 'Divine Madman'.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

#### DAY 10 - Paro

Visit the Wangduephodrang Dzong en route back to Paro. Also call in at Simtokha Dzong, the oldest in Bhutan, housing the Institute for Language and Culture Studies. Paro sightseeing includes the Ta Dzong, originally built as a watchtower, but now housing the National Museum. Then walk down the trail to visit Rinpung Dzong, ("fortress of the heap of jewels"), a large monastery with a long and fascinating history.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

#### DAY 11 - Paro Sightseeing

This morning, visit the Tiger's Nest, perched on the side of a cliff, 900m above the Paro valley floor. This famous tiered temple of red and gold was founded by the Guru Rinpoche who arrived on the back of his mistress, who had turned herself into a tigress. It's now visited by all Bhutanese at least once in their lifetime. Later drive up the valley to Drukgyel Dzong – a ruined fortress. Along the way, visit the 7th Century Kyichu Lhakhang temple, one of the 108 temples built in the Himalayas by Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. The building of this temple marks the introduction of Buddhism in Bhutan. This evening, enjoy a Celebration Dinner of Himalayan proportions, and toast the culmination of this extraordinary journey with your new found friends.(Buffet Breakfast / Celebration Dinner)

#### DAY 12 - Depart Paro

Time to say farewell! After breakfast, transfer to Paro airport for your onward flights. Perhaps extend your stay with an Extension Trip?(Buffet Breakfast)