

Experience Bhutan through its whole length as you drive from west to central valleys and to the far remote East. The trip includes varieties of experiences, starting out by car from Paro your journey east through the Bhutanese Capital of Thimphu and then the picturesque valleys of Punakha, Phobjikha and Trongsa. You will spend a couple of days in the spectacular valley of Bumthang, hiking around the valley visiting the sacred and ancient old temples that dot the valley, and take excursions to villages. We continue another day of driving to Mongar through the lush pristine forest, spectacular waterfalls and medieval villages. From Mongar, we will have a day excursion to Lhuntse, the ancestral home of Bhutan's Royal Family, and then to Trashigang and finally to the plains of Bhutan and to Gauhati in India to catch up your onward flight to Bangkok, Delhi or Kolkatta.

Day 1 : In clear weather, Druk Air's flight to Bhutan provides a wonderful view of Himalayan scenery. Whether flying along the Himalayan range from Kathmandu or over the foothills from Kolkata, it is a breathtaking journey, culminating in an exciting descent past forested hills into the kingdom.

Arrive Paro Air Port, you will be meet by Bhutan Calling Tours & Treks representative and escort you to the Hotel in Paro. In the evening stroll around the Paro town, free mingle with people and do shopping. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 2: Paro, Hike to Taktsang

The trip begins with 20 minutes' drive till the road and start uphill walk for about an hour. Taktsang is the popular name of Taktsang Palphug Monastery, a prominent Himalayan Buddhist sacred site and temple complex, located in the Cliffside of upper Paro valley. On approach path to the monastery, there is a Lhakhang and a temple of Ugyan Tsemo which, like the main monastery, is located on a rocky projection of several hundred feet over the valley. From this location, the monastery's buildings are on the opposite ravine, which is known by the name "COPPER-COLOURED MOUNTAIN PARADISE of Padmasambhava". This is the view point of visitors and there is cafeteria to provide refreshment. Overnight in hotel.

Day 3: Paro/Thimphu

Paro is a most picturesque valley, with quaint hamlets clustered amidst terraced paddy fields. The town still maintains tradition by way of its architecture and simple way of life and your sightseeing includes; visit to The National Museum, formerly a watchtower holds unique and varied collections, ranging from ancient armor to textiles, thangkha paintings, stamps, coins, and natural history. Visit the Paro Dzong (Rinpung Dzong) built in 1646 during the time of

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. It now houses Paro's monk body and the offices of the civil administration. Rinpung Dzong is the venue for the famous Paro Tsechu, held annually in the spring.

In the afternoon, take a drive to Bhutan's capital, Thimphu, passing through idyllic countryside, with villages and paddy fields on either side of the road. Thimphu has a special charm and it is fascinating to sit and watch a gathering of local people in the town square, wearing their traditional dress and going about their business in a typically unhurried Bhutanese way. Overnight in hotel.

Day 4: Thimphu/Punakha

Thimphu, this bustling town is home to Bhutan's royal family, the civil service, and foreign missions with representation in Bhutan. It is also the headquarters for a number of internationally funded development projects.

Morning will visit to Tashichhodzong, the main secretariat building which houses the throne room of His Majesty, the King. Tashichhodzong is also the summer residence of the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot) and the central monk body.

Visit the nearby Institute for ZorigChusum (commonly known as the Painting School), where a six-year training course is given in the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Also visit (outside only) the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, where the medicinal herbs abundant in the kingdom are compounded and dispensed.

After lunch, visit the National Memorial Chorten. The building of this landmark was originally envisaged by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty JigmeDorjiWangchuk, who had wanted to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity.

An hour's drive from Thimphu will take you to this pass (3140 m) where one can have a superb view of the Eastern Himalayas on a clear day with a powerful binocular telescope.

Visit the beautiful 108 chortens built on the hill by Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo for the security and wellbeing of His Majesty the King of Bhutan.

Travel onto Punakha, the old capital of Bhutan and presently the winter residence of the central monk body. Visit the Punakha Dzong, located on the island of the Pho-Chu (male) river and the

Mochu (female) river. Visit the Dho Jha Gha Lam Temple. Overnight in hotel.

Day 5: Punakha/Gangtey

After breakfast, drive to Wangduephodrang and visit the Dzong which is perched on a spur at the confluence of two rivers. The position of the Dzong is remarkable as it completely covers the spur and commands an impressive view both up and down the valley. Wangdue district is famous for its fine bamboo work, stone carvings, and slate which is mined up a valley a few kilometers from the town.

Then drive up a winding mountain road through oak and rhododendron forest, and over a high pass down into the Phobjikha valley, surely one of the loveliest high altitude valleys in Bhutan. Phobjikha is one of Bhutan's few glacial valleys, and chosen winter home of black necked cranes, migrating from the Tibetan plateau. Explore Phobjikha valley and also visit Gangtey Gonpa (Monastery), the only Nyingmapa monastery in western Bhutan.

Day 6: Gangtey/Trongsa

In the morning explore Phobjikha valley, hopefully sighting some black necked cranes, if you are there at the right time of year. Later, drive to Trongsa across Pele-la pass (3,300m/10,830ft). This pass is traditionally considered the boundary between western and central Bhutan. Further down the road, stop to visit Chendebji Chorten erected in the 18th century by a Tibetan lama to cover the remains of an evil spirit that was subdued at this spot. It is built in the Nepalese style, with painted eyes at the four cardinal points.

The landscape around Trongsa is spectacular and its impressive Dzong, stretched along a ridge above a ravine, first comes into view about an hour before the winding road suddenly leads you into the town.

Day 7: Trongsa/Jakar

This morning, visit and experience the masterpiece of Bhutanese architecture at Tongsa Dzong. It was Shabdrung's great – grandfather who founded the first temple at Tongsa in 1543. In 1647 the Shabdrung had begun his great work of expansion and unification, realizing all the advantages that could be gained from Tongsa's position; he constructed the first Dzong at the place where his ancestors had erected the temple. The Dzong was called Choekor Rabtentse. In 1652, Minjur Tenpa, the Penlop of Tongsa, had the Dzong enlarged. The Dzong is built in such a way that in the old days, no matter what direction a traveler comes from, he was obliged to pass through the courtyard of the Dzong. This helped to make the Penlop of this Dzong as powerful as it had a complete control over the east – west traffic. The watch tower above the Dzong further strengthened its defense. The father of the first king known as the black regent and the first king served as the Governor of Tongsa before the emergence of the Bhutanese Monarchy, since then it has become a tradition for the young crown prince to serve as the Governor of this place before he is crowned.

Later visit Ta Dzong on the hillside above the town built as a watchtower to guard Trongsa but recently converted into museum in 2008.

After lunch proceed to Bumthang, one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the holy heartland of Buddhism. The 68 km. journey takes about 3 hours. The road winds steeply up to Yutong La (3,400m/11,155ft), and then run down through dense coniferous forest to enter a wide, open, cultivated valley, known as Chumey valley. From here it is about an hour to Bumthang, a most pleasant run in the soft, late afternoon light.

Day 8: Jakar

Bumthang is the general name given to a group of four valleys – Chumey, Choekhor, Tang and Ura, with altitudes varying from 2,600 to 4,000m/8,530 to 13,125ft.

In the morning we will visit Kurje Lhakhang, one of the most sacred places in the kingdom as Bhutan's "patron saint", Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) meditated here. From Kurje monastery, a tarmac road heads south along the right bank of the river to Jambey Lhakhang. This temple, erected by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century, is one of the two oldest in Bhutan (the other being Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro).

After lunch, we will visit Tamshing Lhakhang, founded in 1501 by Pema Lingpa. It contains interesting and ancient Buddhist wall paintings. Later on we will visit Jakar Dzong, "the castle of the white bird", and then take a stroll through Bumthang's market area before returning to the lodge.

Day 9: Bumthang/Mongar

The journey continues eastwards, winding through more rugged terrain. The drive to Mongar takes about 6 hours, with spectacular views en route. We will drive up into the hills above the valley and then past Ura village, before climbing sharply to the highest point on Bhutan's motor able road network, Thrumsing La (3760m).

From here, the road gradually descends to the alpine valley of Sengor, with wonderful views of cascading waterfalls and the hills of eastern Bhutan along the way. Vegetation changes from alpine to subtropical with the loss of height, and bamboos and luxuriant ferns overhang the road as we drop down to the valley floor. The descent stops at 700m/2,300ft, where we cross the Kuri Chu (river). We ascend again through pine forests, maize fields and eastern hamlets to reach Mongar town, high on a gentle slope above the valley. Picnic lunch at a scenic spot en route to Mongar.

We visit Mongar Dzong, built in the 1930s and one of Bhutan's newest dzongs, but constructed

in the same way as all previous dzongs, without either plans or the use of nails.

Day 10: Excursion to Lhuntse

Today, we will take a drive to Lhuntse which is one of the most isolated districts in Bhutan. The landscape is spectacular, with stark cliffs towering above river gorges and dense coniferous forests. The region is famous for its weavers, and their distinctive textiles are generally considered to be the best in the country. The Kurtoe region of Lhuentse is the ancestral home of the monarchy.

In the morning, we will visit the Dzong which sits high on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Kurichu valley. Lhuntse Dzong is one of the most picturesque in Bhutan. After lunch, we will take a short drive to explore Menji village for its distinctive textiles before we start heading back to Mongar.

Day 11: Mongar/Tashigang

This trip of about 96 km. takes only 3 hours. The first part of journey is through leafy forest filled with ferns. After driving through the Kori-la pass (2,450m/8,040ft), marked by a pretty Chorten and a Mani wall, we descend rapidly through corn fields and banana groves to reach the famous road zigzags just below Yadi, a fairly recent and now fast-growing settlement. After zigzagging down the hillside, the road east runs along the Gamri River. A turnoff on the left leads up to Drametse. The temple, perched on top of a steep hill above the village, was founded by Choeden Zangmo and is the most important monastery of eastern Bhutan. This is the place of origin of the famous Drametse Nga Chham, a masked dance with drums. About 30 km. onwards lies Trashigang (1,100m/3,610ft), which clings to a steep hillside above the Gamri river. Trashigang is the principal township of the biggest and most populated district in the country.

After lunch, we will visit Trashigang Dzong, standing at the extreme end of a rocky outcrop far above the river gorge. It serves as the administrative seat for the district and part of the Dzong is occupied by the local monastic community.

Day 12: Trashigang/Samdrup Jongkhar

The Trashigang /Samdrup Jongkhar road was completed in 1965, and the journey down to the Indian border takes about 6 hours. Along the way, we pass by Sherubtse College in Kanglung, which was founded in 1978 and is a degree granting institution affiliated to the University of Delhi. We also visit the nearby Zangtho Pelri temple representing Guru Rinpoche's paradise,

built in 1978 by the late Minister of Home Affairs. We then drive on to Khaling, home of the National Institute for the Disabled and the Weaving Centre. From here, it is a further 80 km. to Deothang, which is remembered in history as the site of a famous 19th century battle fought during the Duar Wars, in which the forces of Jigme Namgyal defeated the British. The road then descends fairly rapidly to the plains through dense tropical forest with an abundance of teak, bamboo and ferns.

Day 13: Samdrup Jongkhar/Gawahati

After breakfast, drive to Gawahati, the capital town of the Indian north-eastern state of Assam, for flight to Bangkok, Delhi, Kolkata or onward program in that region.