

# Peaceful Dragon | 8 Days



BHUTAN – perched high in the Himalaya, captures the imagination with its massive Buddhist monasteries and hospitable people. It is a land of superlatives, the last surviving example of a Tibetan Buddhist Kingdom that proudly guard and treasures its cultural and natural heritage. Blessed with a tiny population and steep inaccessible valleys and rolling hills and towering crags, with only small patches of cultivation, it holds fabulous pristine forest that are almost entirely untouched and full of wildlife. All these factors combine to make this country one of the most rewarding and thrilling culture, nature and adventure tour destinations available today. This holiday can take you in to stunning Buddhist temples, monasteries and pagodas, at their best. travel-to-nature Asia Nepal is sure to get you closer to these fascinating cultural events, together with all the people and places that make Bhutan unique ever.

### Trip Highlights

- Experience Bhutan's colourful, vibrant masked dance
- Experience Archery, the national sport of the Kingdom
- Visit the Paro Dzong and the incredible 'Tiger's Nest' monastery at Taktsang
- Drive across the Dochu La and visit Punakha Dzong
- Walk in the quiet Gangtey Valley
- Visit the impressive Tashichho Dzong in Thimphu
- Travel in a country where very few foreigners visit and tourism is still in its infancy

### Detailed Itinerary

#### Day 1: Arrive in Paro | Drive to Thimphu (2,334 m | 51 km | 1.5 hrs)

Welcome to Bhutan! Upon arrival in Paro, clear customs and immigration. Keep your copy of the visa clearance letter handy. Passport size pictures are no longer required and your visa has been paid. Our guide and driver will be outside the terminal building who will drive us to Thimphu for lunch.

We have an hour's drive to Thimphu, stopping at the Zilukha Nunnery and Kyichu Lakang en route. The Kyichu Lakhang was one of a series of temples built by the 7th century Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo. After being lost for a few centuries the temple was rediscovered in the 17th century and additions followed in the late 19th century and in the 1960s, following the same style as the original temple. The Paro Valley is considered to be one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan, with blue pine-covered hills and attractive solidly built houses among the paddy fields. Thimphu is the capital of Bhutan and there are many things to see including the memorial chorten, Buddha Point, Tashichho Dzong, plus the market is interesting to explore. If we do not see everything today we have more time in Thimphu on our return.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Riverview

**Meals:** Lunch, Dinner

#### Day 2: Drive Thimphu - Punakha (1350 m | 74 km | 2.25 hrs)

We leave Thimphu in the morning and drive east to Punakha. The route climbs its way steadily on a good road to the Dochula Pass. At 3,050 m the views over the eastern Himalaya are magnificent although this is most definitely weather dependent! We then descend to the valley floor and continue to sub-tropical Punakha. At an altitude of 1,350 m the difference in temperature and flora is apparent. Punakha is the winter capital of Bhutan and the dzong was the second one in the country to be built. This remarkable

# Peaceful Dragon | 8 Days

fortress is situated between two rivers and it has survived many fires, an earthquake and a glacial flood. Over the years it has been repaired and added to and has several interesting features to protect it against invasion. Overnight in Punakha or Wangdi Phodrang.

**Accommodation:** Meri Puensum Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 3: Morning hike to Chime Lakhang | Drive to Gangtey (2,900 m | 84 km | 2.5 hrs)

This morning we take a gentle hike (approx. 1.5 km/120 m ascent, less than an hour each way) up to the Chime Lakhang (monastery), a 15th-century monastery built to honor one of the more folkloric saints of Bhutanese tradition, Lama Drukpa Kuenley. The lama was known for his foul-mouth, alcohol-smelling breath and insatiable lust towards women, yet he is revered as a great saint by most Bhutanese. Women who cannot conceive believe that if they get blessed by the wooden phallus they will get pregnant.

From here we continue across the Lawala Pass towards the Gangtey Valley, visiting the ruins of Wangdue Dzong, en route. Arriving at the Gangtey Valley, we will visit Gangtey monastery, the largest private monastery in Bhutan. Today's drive is approximately 84 km and will take 2.5 to 3 hours, although variable road conditions may mean we spend longer on the road.

**Accommodation:** Dewachen Hotel & Spa

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 4: Explore Phobjikha Valley

We spend our whole day exploring the valley. This morning we will go on a hike through the Gangtey Valley. This glacial valley is made up of farmlands, pastures and blue-pine forests. We will encounter herders caring for their herds, which graze on the dwarf bamboo of the area. Gangtey is famous for sightings of the rare Black-necked cranes, which fly from Tibet in late October and spend the winter here before returning to Tibet in spring.

### Gangtey Gompa

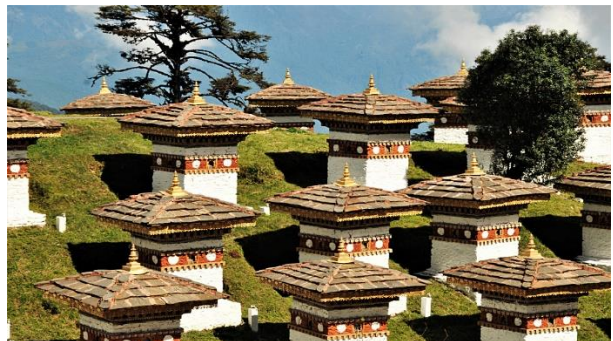
Gangtey Gompa monastery sits atop a hillock that overlooks the Phobjikha valley. It is headed by the ninth Gangtey Trulku and is the largest Nyingma monastery in western Bhutan. It was founded in 1613 by Gyalse Pema Thinlay, a grandson and reincarnation of influential treasure finder Pema Lingpa. Incarnate line of Pema Thinlay, representing the body aspects of Pema Lingpa, contrasted with mind and speech emanations. The monastery has been recently built and surrounding the monastery are village homes and hermitages.

### Black-Necked Crane Information Centre

The centre displays about the cranes and the valley environment. You can use the centre's powerful spotting scopes and check what you see against its pamphlet 'Field Guide to Crane Behaviour'. If the weather's iffy you can browse the library and handicraft shop, and watch videos at 10am and 3 pm. This is also the centre of the valley's fledgling ecotourism.

**Accommodation:** Dewachen Hotel & Spa

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



### Day 5: To Thimphu

Early in the morning we drive for about four hours back to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, where we will have a chance to visit the Tashichho Dzong, one of Bhutan's most stately and impressive buildings. It has been the seat of the government of Bhutan since

# Peaceful Dragon | 8 Days

1952 and houses the throne room and offices of the king.

We will also visit the impressive golden-spired Memorial Chorten, built in 1974 by the Royal Grandmother in memory of the Third King, H M Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. In the evening there will be time to explore the market followed with Mask Dance performances and dinner.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Riverview

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



## Day 6: Drive to Paro | Tiger's Nest Monastery hike (3,150 m)

This morning we drive back to Paro (approx. 1 hours' drive) and further up the valley to the car park below Taktsang. We then hike (approx. 9 km) to the monastery, also known as 'Tiger's Nest' Monastery. This spectacular building is perched on the ledge of a cliff high above the Paro Valley. Partly destroyed by fire in 1998, it has now been completely restored to its former magnificence. From the car park to the viewpoint is about 2 hours uphill walk through the forest. From here we have incredible views of the monastic buildings which cling impossibly to the cliff wall. For the energetic there is the chance to walk even higher to the actual monastery. This will take another 2 hours. There are horses available for those who do not want to do the hike but please note that this is an unregulated activity and helmets are not available.

**Accommodation:** Tashi Namgay Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 7: Paro Sightseeing | Archery Session

After our leisurely breakfast, we drive for the archery session which is organized for us. Lunch at the local restaurant. After lunch we visit Bhutanese traditional farm house, Drukgyel Dzong and the National Museum.

### Archery

Archery is played during religious and secular public holidays in Bhutan, local festivals (tsechu), between public ministries and departments, and between the dzonkhag and the regional teams. Archery tournaments and performances have also become a significant point of interest for tourism in Bhutan. Archery in Bhutan is the national sport of the Kingdom. Archery was declared the national sport in 1971, when Bhutan became a member of the United Nations. Since then, the popularity of Bhutanese archery has increased both inside and outside Bhutan, with a measure of government promotion. Bhutan also maintains an Olympic archery team.

### Farm House or Village Home

Bhutanese farmhouses are colorful, decorative and traditionally built without any nails. Majority of the houses are with three story, first floor is utilized for sheltering cattle, second floor for the family to live in and the top for storing and drying of foods and fodder for animal. Almost all the farmhouses follow the same architectural pattern. A visit to farmhouse is interesting and provides you with an experience to the daily life of average Bhutanese.

### Ruins of Drukgyel Dzong

Ruins of Drukgyel dzong stands 14 km north of Paro town at the end of the road. It was built in 1644 to commemorate the victory of Bhutan over Tibet. It served as the administrative and religious center for Paro until 1951 when fire broke out and damaged this huge structure. Now it stands in complete ruin.

### National Museum

Established in 1967, the museum is housed inside a circular Ta Dzong, an ancient Watch Tower. It holds fascinating collection of arts, relics, religious thangka paintings, households stuffs, arms, handicrafts, stuffed animals and Bhutan's famous Stamps among others. (open 10-4pm).

# Peaceful Dragon | 8 Days

**Accommodation:** Tashi Namgay Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



## Day 8: Depart Paro

Transfer to the airport for your homeward-bound flight.

**Meal:** Breakfast

### Includes

- Airport (pick up/drop off) transfers by private A/C vehicle
- Bhutan visa
- 7-night accommodation in twin sharing room in comfort hotels
- All meals, afternoon tea and bottled water throughout the tour in Bhutan
- English speaking licensed guide throughout the tour
- Private vehicle with a driver and long road permit
- Farmhouse visit and a meals
- Temple Ceremony & Blessing
- Royalty and all internal taxes
- All entrance fees to the mentioned monument, museum visits
- All sightseeing programme as per the itinerary
- All applicable government taxes

### Excludes

- International flight tickets
- Visa fee
- Travel insurance
- Meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Personal clothing and equipment
- Tips for trip leader/guide, driver, hotel staff and porters
- Items of personal nature such as alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, laundry, and other unforeseen expenses
- Items/services not listed in "included"
- Extra expenses/payment for 'Optional' activities/programs if participated

### Accommodation

#### Hotel Riverview, Thimphu

One of the finest properties in Thimphu, elegantly situated on the East bank of Thimphu River. It presents commanding view of both town and the valley. An interesting feature of the place is the fact that all the rooms overlook Thimphu River and have private balconies offering panoramic vistas.

#### Meri Puensum Resort, Punakha

Situated on a hilltop, offering panoramic vistas across the river and the valley, Meri Puensum, established in 1999, is one of the first resorts to come up in the serene and culturally rich valley of Punakha. This family run resort delivers highly personalized services and takes special care to the needs of its guests, in true tradition of Bhutanese hospitality.



# Peaceful Dragon | 8 Days

### Dewachen Hotel & Spa, Gangtey

Encircled by pine forests in the picturesque valley of Phobjikha, Dewachen hotel features 28 spacious, comfortably furnished rooms, with en suite facilities. All rooms are designed and decorated in traditional Bhutanese style perfectly blended with natural surroundings, for a perfect hideaway relaxation. Rooms are well heated by traditional 'bukhari' (iron stove), so you feel cozy and comfortable during cold winter nights.

### Tashi Namgay Resort, Paro

The resort is set amidst five acres of lush foliage and green lawns. Located conveniently in the heart of Paro Valley but away from the distractions of the main town, Tashi Namgay Resort offers you a calm and peaceful environment within its compound. Traditional Bhutanese and modern architecture have been uniquely blended, yet offering all the amenities of a modern lifestyle.



### Group/Individual

On this trip you will be traveling privately with your family & friends. Our representative/tour partner will look after your transfers to and from the airport and will be around to answer other questions you may have about your trip.

### Accommodation – Hotel, Resort

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a fine heritage hotel in another or a family-run guesthouse

or lodges in a smaller town. Accommodation in remote areas tend to be basic and may not have western amenities.

### Single Accommodation

Single (room) supplement is provided on request (single supplement charge applies) and are subject to availability.

### Food & Transport

All meals - 7 breakfasts, 7 lunches and 7 dinners are included.

Bhutanese cuisine is influenced by Chinese, Tibetan and Indian culture and generally in spicy side. However, don't be too worried if you aren't able to eat food that is too spicy. A majority of Bhutan's professional chefs/cooks take into account the foreigners' less spicy taste. The hotel/restaurant meals in Bhutan are usually buffet style and include Bhutanese and Western food.

For airport, sightseeing transfers, and for long drives we use a private air-con car, jeep, van depending upon group size. Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

### Weather

Generally, the ideal time to visit Bhutan is either in autumn from September to November or in spring between March and May. Himalayan views tend to be best between October to December, as the weather is generally clear with sunny skies. From March to May the valleys are awash with colour when the famous rhododendrons bloom (particularly in May); the country has over 45 wild species. You will experience a range of temperatures during the trip depending on the altitude. During the day temperatures will be approx. 10°C-20°C. At night temperatures will drop in autumn to about 3°C-4°C.

### Baggage Allowance

At time of writing the standard weight limit is one checked baggage is 25kg (55lb) and hand baggage 7kg

# Peaceful Dragon | 8 Days

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(15lbs). We recommend packing only one piece of checked baggage. Luggage allowances for both hand and checked luggage are subject to change, we suggest you check the airline's website for the latest information prior to your departure.

Please note there is no direct flight to Paro (Bhutan) from Europe or America. You can fly to Paro either via Kathmandu (Nepal) or Delhi (India).

## ESSENTIAL/PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Passport & Visas

All nationalities require a passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information below is primarily for EU passport holders, and other nationalities should check with the relevant embassies. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Visa is required to enter Bhutan and as per government rules Bhutan visa should be processed through a travel agency. Hence, we will arrange/process visa for you. You will need to send us a clear copy of your passport at the time of booking; as we have to arrange/process in advance. It can either be sent by post or scanned; it should be very clear and in colour. If you need to get a new passport for the journey, please apply for this immediately, and send us the copy/scan as soon as you receive your new passport. It is important the information you give us is correct, and that the passport copy you send us is the one on which you will be travelling to Bhutan.

**Please note:** Visa regulations can change without notice, therefore please check the current regulations

or contact us.

### Vaccination & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad.

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements for Bhutan. However, recommended vaccinations for this trip are: Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid, Hepatitis A, hepatitis B, cholera, rabies, and tuberculosis.

You will also need a yellow fever vaccination certificate if you're arriving from a country with risk of yellow fever transmission or transiting for more than 12 hours through a country with risk of yellow fever transmission. Please confirm your vaccine recommendations and requirements with your doctor or travel clinic.

Dengue (a tropical viral disease spread by daytime biting mosquitoes) risk is present throughout the country at elevations below 2300 m. There is currently no vaccine or prophylaxis available, so take the usual precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

### Local Time

UTC/GMT + 6 hours.

### Electricity

Bhutan operates on 230V and 50 Hz. There are three plug types in Bhutan - C, D & G. Plug type C has two round pins, whereas type D also has round pins but three. Plug G has three rectangular pins in a triangular pattern.

### Money

The Bhutanese unit of currency is the Ngultrum and 1Nu = 100 Chetrum. The Ngultrum is pegged to the value of the Indian Rupee and at the time of this publication (May 2023) the approximate exchange rates are 92 Euro and 82 US\$.

# Peaceful Dragon | 8 Days

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It is illegal to import or export Ngultrum. You are advised to bring most of your money in cash as you may have difficulty changing travellers cheques outside Thimphu/Paro. It makes no difference whether you bring Euro or US Dollars. You should change your money on arrival at Paro either at the airport or hotel (please note that the hotel often gives a better rate than the airport).

To get the best exchange rates for Ngultrum, bigger denominations Euro/US\$ that are in pristine conditions (no fold, no mark, no tear, no stain) are required.

### ATM | Credit Cards

Throughout the major towns of Bhutan, you will find ATM kiosks of the major Bhutanese banks like the Bank of Bhutan, Druk PNB Bank and Bhutan National Bank. Money can be withdrawn from these ATM kiosks using some major credit cards such as Visa and MasterCard. We recommend you change most of the money you need for the trip before leaving Thimphu. Please do not rely wholly on ATM machines as often they are broken or run out of cash. Credit cards are accepted in larger shops, handicraft stores and hotels in Thimphu other major towns.

### Extra Expenses & Spending Money

You will need to bring some extra money to cover drinks, laundry, souvenirs and any other personal expense, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Though it totally depends on individual but generally an approximate amount of US\$150 per person, per week should be sufficient (more if you enjoy a few beers); however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount. Or if you are the one frugal with money probably allocating less would also suffice.

Optional Tours may be offered in some city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may

wish to participate in any extra activities. Each optional tour/activity will be arranged locally by our local partner/guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

### Tipping

Tipping is of course entirely at your discretion and it is not customary and compulsory in Bhutan but always appreciated. Tips should be given individually and at the end of their service.

### Itinerary Change

In case of some unusual events/incidents the order of programs (sightseeing, excursions etc.) might have to change in order to accommodate the local situations. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements while maintaining the overall integrity of your trip.

The domestic airlines may change their schedule frequently and, in such cases, our local partner/guide will inform you about the changes.

### Travel Insurance

We highly recommend to choose/get an insurance plan/policy that covers your needs. And please make sure to keep/carry a hard-copy of your travel insurance documents on your person while on tour. It's prudent to check thoroughly the inclusions and procedure to file claims prior to purchasing insurance coverage. *travel-to-nature Asia* will not be responsible for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to purchase appropriate travel insurance from the date of booking.

### Important Information

On all guided trips although our leaders/guides are well trained to deal with different capabilities, if they have any concerns about someone's ability to safely partake in an activity, or their impact on other people's enjoyment, we authorize them to take necessary action which, in some circumstances, may involve asking someone to miss that activity.