



# AHKE Adventure Travel

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*-Adventure - Culture - Eco Tours - Buddhism -*

## **THE BEST OF THE HIMALAYAN KINGDOM**



The Kingdom of BHUTAN, The land of the peaceful Dragon, nestles in the heart of some of the world highest peaks. This tiny beautiful Kingdom only opened its gates to foreigners in 1974. It remains the society, where age old culture and traditional life continues as it had been for centuries. With about 69% of population still living in rural Bhutan, farming is an occupation for the majority of Bhutanese. Age old barter system is still practiced in some places, and ties within the huge joint family often with more than 50 members are common sights.

This “The Best of Himalayan Kingdom” tour gives you insight of this Himalayan Kingdom in best possible way. You will be escorted through beautiful valleys of Paro, Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, and the picturesque and sub tropical valleys of Punakha, Wangdue & Phobjey Kha Valley in central west Bhutan, and through picturesque valley of and Bumthang in central Bhutan. You will encounter magic of simple Bhutanese life that transform into happiness and contentment making the society truly peaceful and happy. Village lives are simple and pure. People’s thoughts are straight forward and undiluted. Here you will meet monks in their monasteries during their chanting or other monastic activities. Road passes through Bhutan’s rich forest reserves and mountain environment. At all places, you will come across smiling Bhutanese faces, and you will be treated to mouth watering international foods, and drinks recipe. There many more surprises waiting for you in Bhutan.



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## **-TRIP NOTES-**

**Trip Name:** “The Best of Himalayan Kingdom”  
**Best Season:** Year Round.  
**Duration:** 11 Days/10 nights in Bhutan  
**Grade:** Soft Adventure  
**District to visit:** Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, W/du, Gangtey, Trongsa & Bumthang  
**Trip Leader:** AHKE Adventure’s Senior Guide

## **-DETAIL ITINERARY-**

Anticipated Itinerary, but actual route may vary slightly, when final Itinerary is presented on booking tour.

### **DAY 01 ARRIVAL AT PARO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Fly on Druk Air to Paro. Druk Air is a Bhutan national flag bearer, which has an exclusive right to fly to Bhutan from 6 other sectors. Limited flight allows only restricted amounts of flyers into this beautiful Himalayan Kingdom, there by preventing and conserving valuable culture and environment that has remain intact for centuries. Culture and environmental protection are two important pillars for achieving enhanced Gross National Happiness in Bhutan.

The flight to Paro is one of the most amazing experiences. On clear days, during this flight, you will experience breathtaking views of the Himalayan Mountains including Mt. Everest, and Jichu Drak and Chomolhari in Bhutan. There is never ending panoramic view of distance mountain ranges as we glide beside it for fairly long time.

Hostess will guide you to fill in disembarkation forms. Landing in Paro International Airport is something you will remember of for long time. You will need to jot down your address in Bhutan as C/o AHKE Adventure Travel. Your visa details will be made available in advance, and in case of any problems, AHKE Adventure representative will be at the airport to assist you.

Few minutes before landing, flight will criss cross through many mountains, allowing you to have most spectacular view of village in and around district of Paro. Thickly forested mountains with winding trails passing through scattered village are common sight down below.

Paro (2300m MSL) valley is more than beautiful district of Bhutan. Paro is also fertile and fairly flat valley stretching along one side for more than 20 kms. Farmers here are



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considered economically better than their counterparts in most other regions in Bhutan. Produce like apple, paddy, and chili are cultivated and traded in local and international markets. It has some historically important monasteries and cultural sites. This beautiful terraced valley is known for Bhutanese red rice and summer fruits and vegetables. Farmers here find easy accessibility to market for their farm produce.

You will land in a beautiful valley of Paro, located at an elevation of 7,400 ft. At Paro International Airport you will be received by Representative of AHKE Adventure Travel. You will be welcomed with traditional reception. White Khaddar or scarf with Buddhist blessing will be presented to you to be carried along your journey.

Drive to Paro Town, which is 20 minutes away from Airport. Have lunch, and walk along small town design and constructed in typical Bhutanese architecture.

After short stroll, drive to Thimphu, the capital town of Bhutan. During this ride, you will pass through idyllic countryside giving some idea about what you might come across in your journey in next 10 days.

Thimphu (2,280 Mts.) is a small, bustling city in the heart of the Himalayas. Thimphu charm comes not only from its wealth of museums or places of historic interest, but also from the strong national character of its architectural style. A stroll through this lively town and into its shops reveals an interesting combination of tradition and modernity. Arrive Thimphu and then transfer to your hotel. Evening is free to rest or walk around Town. You'll feel like you've gone back in time. Notice the dress, the traditional architecture and the fresh, clean air.

Just before the Dinner, your escort will make brief presentation of the whole trip program. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu.

## **DAY 02: THIMPHU (Excursion).**

Today's after breakfast sightseeing in Thimphu valley includes visits to: National Memorial Chorten: The building of this landmark was envisaged by the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, as a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it is both a memorial to the late king ('the father of modern Bhutan'), and a monument to world peace. The painting and statues inside the monument provide a deep insight into Buddhist philosophy; National Library, which holds a vast collection of Buddhist texts and manuscripts, some dating back several hundred years, as well as modern academic books mainly on Himalayan culture and religion.

Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as the Painting School) where students undertake a six-year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan:



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National Institute of Traditional Medicine, where the medicinal herbs, mineral, and animals organs available in abundant in the kingdom are compounded and dispensed by traditional pharmacist and medical practitioners. This indigenous healing method is popular amongst all Bhutanese people, and runs in parallel to modern medicine in all district head quarter. Here you will have exclusive privilege of talking to a renowned traditional healer.

Folk Heritage and National Textile Museums: These museums, both of which opened in 2001, provide fascinating insight into Bhutanese material culture and way of life.

Handicrafts Emporium: This government-run enterprise displays a wide range of beautifully hand-woven textiles and craft products. It also carries a small collection of books on Bhutan, Buddhism and Himalayan culture.

## **DAY 3 THIMPHU -WANGDUE (Approx. Driving Distance/Time:77 KMs/3-3 ½ Hrs).**

Today after breakfast drive to Punakha via Thimphu across Dochu-la pass (3,088m/10,130ft).

If possible, en route visit Simtokha Dzong, built in 1627 and the oldest fortress of the kingdom. It now houses the institute for language and cultural studies. Then drive up further on route, you will come across many farmers selling farm produces like, apples, peach, plum, pears, asparagus, cucumber, wild mushrooms at numerous spots. Just stop at few places and try some fresh fruits, or look at wild Chanterelle or Mustake mushroom.

We will stop at Hongtso to fill in immigration documentation required for travelers.

Drive up further in few minutes, you will come across Dochula pass (3050 M), which provides a superb view of the highest peaks of Bhutan, such as Gangkar, Puensum, table Mountain, Masakhang etc. If weather permitting, we can stop at Cafeteria for tea and snacks. From here you will get fantastic panoramas of Himalayan peaks along densely forested hills.

Drive further down and visit village house in Metsina and hike up to 16<sup>th</sup> century temple where you can seek blessing from lord of fertility. This temple was initiated by Devine Madman or Erotic Lama. This lama framed Bhutanese version of erotic stories or Kamasutra in 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Here replica of Poo or religious penis will touch above your forehead to bless you with fertility. Listen to unceasing rotation of prayer wheels making repeated sound of bells in the temple.

Until 1955 Punakha served as the capital of Bhutan and it is still the winter seat of the Je khenpo (chief Abbot). In evening visit Punakha Dzong build in the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the junction of Pho Chu and Mo Chu rivers. Damaged by fires, floods and earthquake over the centuries, the Dzong has recently been fully restored to its original glory.

Overnight at the beautiful hotel in Punakha.



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## **DAY 04 PUNAKHA – BUMTHANG (Approx. Driving Distance/Time: 212 KMs/7 ½ -8 Hrs)**

Early morning Drive to Bumthang, across Pelela pass (3300 m), the traditional boundary between east and west. The passes are marked by a large numbers of prayer flag. Surrounding areas covered with high altitude dwarf bamboo and dwarf Rhododendron shrubs. Drive further and stop en route at Chenbji Chotern which was built in 18th century by a lama named Shida. This is a stupa with eyes similar to the Buddhanath stupa in Nepal. Drive further for an hour and you will come across spectacular view of Trongsa Dzong. The largest Dzong in Bhutan. Check in at Restaurant for Lunch. If time permits, we can take tour of Ta-Dzong, and Trongsa Dzong, the most impressive Dzong in the kingdom and possibly one of the most aesthetic and magnificent works of traditional Bhutanese architecture.

If there is time, you may wish to walk along the road in Trongsa Town. And board Bus to Bumthang, across Yotong-La Pass at an altitude of 11,685/3404 Mts. and then to Bumthang. Enroute visit the Chume valley, where local women weave the famous "Bumthang Yathra", pure woolen cloth woven in the traditional method with beautiful colored patterns.

Bumthang is one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the heartland of Buddhism. Here the great teachers meditated and left in their walk many sacred grounds. The Guru and his lineage of Tertons, treasure finders, have led to the sprouting of many temples in the valley. Visit the famous Kurjey, Jamby and Tamshing Lkhakhangs. Also the Jakar Dzong, seat of the dist. administration. Dinner and overnight in Lodge.

## **DAY 05 BUMTHANG (EXCURSION)**

Today we enjoy Bumthang sightseeing. Beauty again overwhelms our senses. We will drive to visit the Wangdicholing, formerly the palace of Royal. Continuing from Wangdichholing Palace, we reach Jambay and Kurjey Monastery and then visit Jakar Dzong and Tamshing Monasteries. We stop for refreshment at the Swiss Farm House, Cheese and Beer Factory and village handicraft shops. Overnight at Hotel.

## **DAY 06 BUMTHANG – GANGTEY (Approx. Driving Distance/Time: 150 KMs/5-6 Hrs)**

Morning drive to Gantey Valley via Trongsa. Gangtey is situated in Phubjikha valley, which the winter home of endangered Black-Necked Cranes that migrate to this valley from Central Asia in winter. Gangtey is situated in Phobjeykha valley (3,000 MTs). It is a wide, all most flat, beautiful alpine valley. It is also called Gangtey, after the famous



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monastery. It is approx. 70 Km/ 2 ½ hours by bus. This is a scenic drive through dense forests of oak trees and rhododendrons. On entering Gangtey valley, we will be greeted by wide mountain valley. This valley is a flat valley, resembling that of Tibetan plateau on the western slopes of Black Mountain national park. Gangtey fall within protected area of Black Mountain Park. Gangtey is now home to Potato farmers, who are equally wealthy due to recent growth in trade with India.

As you enter, you will notice that Gangtey Goenpa, or monastery rises on a small spur located at the valley's center. It is one of the oldest and largest Nyingma Buddhist centre in Bhutan. Gangtey Tulku Rimpoche is widely revered Buddhist teacher in west. As the ninth in incarnation of Terton Pemalingpa; 14th-century treasure revealer saint from central Bhutan, and known to be an Ancestor of present Wangchuck dynasty, he is head lama of the monastery.

Check in to Hotel, (could be in a family run hotel).and evening at leisure. You will enjoy completely different kind of stay in Gangtey unlike in all other hotels in this trip. Prepare for this once in life time experience.

## **DAY 07 GANGTEY-WANGDUE (Approx. Driving Distance/Time: 60 KMs/2**

Morning, visit 17<sup>th</sup> century Monastery, and drive further down to iInformation centre for the Black-Necked Cranes. This centre is maintained by a NGO; Royal Society for the Protection Nature. The Black Neck Crane roost in the swampy marshland during winter. We can see this magnificent birds in their winter nesting home. Or it may be early to see crane, but depends on each year. These endangered birds fly south from Siberia and Tibet. The calls of the Black-Necked Crane locally known as Thrung Thrung Karm have inspired folklore for generations. RSPN and Phobjikha Community are now working together to protect the habitat of endangered Black Necked Cranes. There is annual festival to celebrate and create awareness about importance of this protected bird species. Community participation is active.

We can look for caretaker of the centre to answer some of our questions. Later stroll around the village. After the visit, drive down back to Wangduephodrang. On the way, stop for Photo in few place. On arrival at wangdue, and depending on time, we can check in at local restaurant for warm lunch. Later visit Wangdue dzong, and stroll around congested temporary local market. Overnight at Hotel or resort in Wangdue beside clean blue river.

## **DAY 08 WANGDUE – THIMPHU (Approx. Driving Distance/Time: 77 KMs/2 ½ Hrs)**

Today, we start day little early at around 7 AM. Proceed or return to Thimphu on the same way we took on the first day. Check in at Dochula pass for any view of distant



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Mountain. If sky is clear, we spent time at Cafeteria, if not we drive straight to Thimphu. Thimphu, perhaps the most unusual capital city in the world, is the seat of government. This bustling town is home to Bhutan's royal family, many civil servants, and foreign embassy and consulates with representation in Bhutan. It is also the headquarters for a number of international offices and development projects.

## **DAY 09 THIMPHU-PARO (Approx. Driving Distance/Time: 65 KMs/1 ½ Hrs)**

Morning drive to Paro. Sightseeing around the Paro valley includes visit to Ta Dzong which houses the National Museum, the ruins of Drugyel Dzong and the courtyard of Kichu Lhakhang one of the oldest monasteries in Bhutan - dated 7th century AD. Visit National Museum housed at Paro Ta Dzong (Dzong means Fortress). It was originally built as a tower, from where to watch invaders planning attack on Paro Rinpung Dzong. It has grandeur collection and model from Bhutanese Arts, Crafts, and Natural world. On different floor, different themes are depicted. Wide range of antique thanka's, religious objects, text, and different symbols of religious values are showcased. Small temple, weapons, armory, household objects are other things displayed inside museum.

Then walk down to Rinpung Dzong meaning 'fortress of the heap of jewels'. This fortress was built in middle of 17<sup>th</sup> century. Your guide will explain to you fascinating story behind the history of Dzong. Like in all Dzong around country, Rinpung Dzong also has two divisions. One part houses monk's body, while another part has offices of local Dzongkhag or district administration. You will come across large monks' prayer room, and many small temples dedicated to different Buddhist deities. You will have chance to visit some of the temple, and marvel over wall paintings, and Thangkas.

Walk down and pass through old wooden bridge constructed over Pachu or river. Here scene from little Buddha was short by director [Bernardo Bertolucci](#).

Lunch at a restaurant in Paro town. After lunch drive to Kyichu Lhakhang, originally built in 7<sup>th</sup> century to tame a she demon in Himalayan region. This monastery houses Miatre or coming Buddha, and it serves as one of the famous pilgrimage places in western Bhutan. And later after evening, take a stroll around Paro town.

## **DAY 10 PARO (TAKTSANG EXCURSION)**

Today after breakfast drive to Drukgyel Dzong, or Dzong in ruins, and on your way, you will observe Takstang Money for today's hike. Visit this ruin of Dzong initially constructed in mid 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Drive back to Ramthongkha and then hike to viewpoint of Taktshang, the Tiger's Nest (one and a half hours). This magical monastery clings to a vertical granite cliff 3,000 ft above the valley floor. The trail is broad and the walk uphill takes you a little more than a



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1000ft above the Paro valley. The view of Taktsang monastery built on the cliff is a spectacular sight. It is a great pilgrim site for the Buddhists and also it is one of the most sacred sites in the Himalayan world, a pilgrimage destination for devout Buddhists. For a close look at the cliff-hanging site, hike about 2 hrs up hills to a view points directly opposite the monastery a hilltop filled with prayer flags. From here Taktsang is clearly seen, clinging to a sheer rock wall 3000 ft above the valleys floor, at an altitude of 10,000ft. Beyond the viewpoint, the path is narrow and steep as it climbs to a point above the temple, from where walkers descend to the building itself.

The main deity of Taktsang is Dorje Drolo, the wrathful form of Guru Rinpoche, the precious Teacher, also known as Padmasambhava. The great tantric mystic is said to have flown here on the back of a tiger, a manifestation of his consort, Yeshe Tsogyal, when he brought the teachings of the Buddhist Dharma to Bhutan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The image of Dorje Drolo inside the temple is shown standing on a tiger. There are 13 sacred sites at Taktsang, and several meditation caves in the cliffs above. Many saints have meditated here, not only Guru Rinpoche but also Milarepa and the female yogin Machig Labdronma. Here you can meditate awhile before beginning the descent. Nearby there is a teahouse, where you can stop for lunch or a snack. Take road down, and evening farm house visit in Paro. Overnight at hotel in Paro.

## **DAY 11 PARO DEPARTURE**

All departure formalities will be made available in advance, and assisted by your guide. Early breakfast at the hotel and drive to the Paro Airport to board the flight.