

The Kingdom of Bhutan... the Land of the Thunder Dragon

DEPARTURES: EVERY DAY

JUNE/JULY/AUGUST 2018

Nestled in the Himalayas is the idyllic nation of Bhutan - the world's only democratic monarchy. Bhutan cautiously emerged from isolation in the 1970's and has since embraced a policy of strictly controlled tourism and development.

Bhutan is a rare gem. In 2006 approximately only 12,000 tourists were permitted to enter and taste the delights of Bhutan's wonderful Buddhist culture, marvel at her magnificent scenery, trek through a stunning array of mountains and valleys and to view some of the world's rarest flora and fauna in a totally unspoiled environment. Bhutan offers sensational opportunities for Eco-friendly visitors and will continue to refrain from indulging in mass-market tourism, although a small increase in visitor numbers has been approved.

Bhutan has resisted globalization and therefore has protected its strong Buddhist culture and way of life. There is little crime, a stable government and exceptionally friendly people. Whether you are a bird-watcher, trekker, weaver, culture seeker or scenery lover... Bhutan is a must see destination, unlike no other.

The country boasts a glorious mosaic of botanical treasures and with its pristine environment these remain largely untouched and in some cases undiscovered. Bhutan is home to an enormous diversity of flora with over 50 species of rhododendrons alone and over 600 species of orchids. Bhutan is famous for the legendary Blue Poppy which blooms only once and then dies. With few people in the world ever setting eyes on it, a mystique surrounds this beautiful species and it is now the national flower of Bhutan.

Join this tour as it winds through breathtaking forests, lush valleys and alpine terrains for a unique journey into the countryside to witness stunning rhododendroms and alpine flowers. Visit monasteries along the way and marvel in the outstanding art and architecture in remote regions.

Geography

The Kingdom of Bhutan, almost exactly the same size as Switzerland, lies east of the Indian state of Sikkim and west of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. It is south of Tibetan region of China and north of the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal. Located in the heart of the high Himalayan mountain range, Bhutan is a land-locked country surrounded by mountains in the north and west.

Altitudes in the south range from 300 to 1370 mtrs. and in the more populated central region range from 120 mtrs. in the east around Trashigang to a high of 5190 mtrs over the highest pass.

This exciting trip takes us to some of the most fascinating places within the majestic Himalayas renowned as **The Last Shangri-La**

As your aircraft approach Bhutan's Paro International Airport sets the scene for what is in store for those lucky tourists in one of the last great frontiers of world travel. Flying into Bhutan is an experience, from the aircraft it is hard to take in the sheer beauty of the scene below. The snow-clad slopes give way to beautiful forests of pine and rhododendron, and just below the tree line, verdant valleys and white water rivers give way to fields of green. There is a sense of timelessness as the plane makes a perfect landing. This is a medieval land, a Kingdom of dreams, dragons, legends and landscapes: of myth and legend: and people so fiercely proud of their history they wear their national dress as a symbol of their loyalty to the land they love. In this fascinating tour you see some of the remains of the Advent of Buddhism in Bhutan and the scenic hills around the valleys.

The architectural style is like non-other on earth and would have to be one of the most popular destinations of tourist today. With it is a land full of warm-hearted proud friendly people who go to unusual lengths to preserve each element of Bhutanese life. Bhutan follows the same principle of integrating traditional Bhutanese hospitality with the most up to date facilities. The hotels, houses and lodges across the country are built and decorated in traditional style and are the best that Bhutan has to offer. Traveler's today can experience Bhutan by means of the most exciting in-depth group travel programs the travel industry has to offer. There are relatively few visitors to this remarkable land making it a unique and moving experience for the privileged few who venture into this hidden paradise.

ITINERARY 12 DAYS/11 NIGHTS

Day 1 Depart Sydney Arrive Bangkok 2215. Own arrangements whilst in Bangkok. Suggested hotel Novatel Airport

Day 2 – Bangkok/Paro/Thimpu

Check in for your flight at the Druk Air counter at 4.50am Depart Bangkok 0650 arrival time Paro 0930 (please note that these flight times may alter slightly). Fly into Himalayas with Druk Air, Bhutan's National Air Carrier The flight to Paro crosses the Himalaya Mountains, affording spectacular views of the awesome peaks, including the sacred Jumolhari and Jichu Drake in Bhutan. Looking from the aircraft we will see the green wall of hills known as dooars, or gateways into Bhutan as well as the silver rivers that thread the valleys, and waterfalls plunging down the forested mountain side. As the aircraft enters the Paro valley, look down and you will see the Paro Dzong overlooking Paro Chu (river) and Ta Dzong, (watch tower) now the national museum. Upon arrival in Paro, we will be greeted by our representative and transferred to a local restaurant for lunch. In the afternoon we will visit the Paro Dzong which was built in 1646 and now houses government offices and religious institutions, as do all the current dzongs (forts). Later in the day we will take the 2 hour drive to Thimphu. Transfer to our hotel freshen up and then if we have time we will visit the paper factory. *Overnight Hotel Thimphu. (BLD)*

Day 3: Thimphu Sightseeing

After breakfast we will drive for approx. 45 minutes through magnificent country side to the start of our 45

minute hike to the Cheri Monastery. We will then drive to the Takin reserve, which contains Bhutan's national animal. Return to Thimpu for a relaxing lunch. After lunch we will tour the School of Arts and Crafts (also known as the painting school), the Textile Museum and the Folk Heritage Museum. The evening we will be entertained by a local cultural performance. ***Overnight Hotel Thimpu. (BLD)***

Day 4: Thimphu - Wangduephodrang, with excursion to Punakha

After breakfast we will drive to Wangduephodrang, with a stop en route for tea at Dochu La (3,100 meters), where on a clear day you will have spectacular views of the Himalayas. We will drive to Punakha the former capital of Bhutan, here we will dine in a local restaurant. After lunch we will visit Punakha Dzong, which is noteworthy both for being one of the most beautiful dzongs in Bhutan and also for having been built by the first Shabdrung in 1637. On the way back from Punakha we will stop at Metshina Village and take a 20-minute walk through the rice fields to Chimi Lhakhang, which is a fertility temple, where if you wish you may receive a special fertility blessing. ***Overnight in Wangduephodrang. (BLD)***

Day 5: Wangduephodrang – Gantey 3 hour drive

After breakfast we will begin the day by driving to Gantey which will take approximately 3 hours. We will pass through dense forests of oak trees and rhododendrons and on arrival in Gantey village we will visit Gantey Gompa, the only Nyingmapa monastery in western Bhutan. From Gantey, you can see the picturesque Black Mountain range as well as Phobjika Valley, the winter habitat of the black-necked cranes. In the afternoon we will take a short hike in this beautiful valley. ***Overnight Farmhouse hotel in Gangtey (BLD)***

Day 6: Gangtey – Bumthang 5 hours drive

This morning we will start early for our 5 hour drive to Bumthang which is located in the heart of Bhutan, and is one of the Kingdom's most attractive destinations for hiking, visiting interesting places or just relaxing. On the way we will stop at Trongsa, the ancestral home of the royal family. The route is along a spectacular winding road, crossing 3,300-meter-high Pele La, and at certain times of year it's possible to see yaks. On the way we will visit the Trongsa Dzong, the masterpiece of Bhutanese architecture, and you'll also see Ta Dzong, the watchtower built to defend this dzong. After lunch, you'll proceed to Bumthang, the religious heartland of the nation, with lush valleys and hilly forests. Along the way you will stop at a yethra (textile weaving) factory, where the yethras are designed with patterns unique to Bumthang, and you can even watch some of the weavers at their looms. You can spend the evening relaxing or strolling through Bumthang town. ***Overnight in Bumthang Guest house (BLD)***

Day 07 Bumthang sightseeing

After breakfast we will have the morning sightseeing. The afternoon and evening is free to explore this fascinating town. ***Overnight in Bumthang Guest house. (BLD)***

Day 08 Bumthang – Tongza 3 hours drive

Today is an easy drive to Tongza on arrival we will lunch and then visit the magnificent Tongza Dzong. For those who are feeling energetic there is a great walk down to the river and a hike up to a fabulous viewpoint. ***Overnight Hotel (BLD)***

Day 09 Tongza – Wangduephodrang We will depart after breakfast for our return journey to Wangduephodrang it is a **long drive** we will stop on the way at a local restaurant for lunch.. ***Overnight***

hotel (BLD)

Day 10 Wangduephodrang – Thimphu- Paro

In the morning we will hike for approx. 2-12 hours through local villages descending down to Punarka where our vehicle will meet us, then it is a short drive to the town of Punarka for lunch. After lunch we will continue onto Paro via Thimphu and transfer to our hotel. The afternoon is yours free to relax.

Overnight Hotel Paro. (BLD)

Day 11 Paro

After breakfast we will hike to the famous Taktsang Monastery. It's a good half day hike, but as we have special permission to visit the monastery the tour should take between 5 hours. The remainder of the day is your to stroll around the town of Paro. ***Overnight Hotel Paro (BLD)***

Day 12 Paro – Bangkok - Sydney Transfer to the airport for your onward journey to Bangkok. Arrive Bangkok approx 1630

12 Day/11 Night Land Content

US\$2160 PER PERSON

MINIMUM 2 PEOPLE

Inclusions.

- *All Airport Transfers
- *Excellent ground transport in Bhutan,
- * clean comfortable traditional hotels and guest houses twin share accom.
- *3 first class meals per day whilst in Bhutan
- *Bottled Mineral Water
- *Bhutan Visa
- *All Sightseeing
- *Entry into all Monasteries
- *English speaking Bhutanese Guide.
- *Comprehensive Trip Notes

Not Included:

International Airfare, Soft and Hard Drinks, Gratuities allow approx. Aust\$100 per person



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