



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

**Nepal a Potpourri of Culture ...the land of Mother Goddess of the Earth**

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## **BHUTAN**

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 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.

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. Travellers 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.

The green wall of hills known as dooars, or gateways into Bhutan from the plains climbs continuously higher as the plane flies north towards the Tibet border. Silver rivers thread the valleys, waterfalls plunge down the forested mountain side, and to the north, the great snowcapped peaks of the inner Himalayas rise up into the sky. As the aircraft enters the Paro valley, look down and you will see the Paro Dzong overlooking Paro Chu (river) with Ta Dzong, watch tower, now the national museum, above it.

The Phobjika valley is entered via a chorten, from where the beautiful valley opens up, with many large houses, empty in winter when their inhabitants move to warmer places around Wangdi. It is a typical glacial U-shaped valley, with marshes and the Nake Chhu (river) running through it. Black-necked cranes congregate here when they migrate from Tibet in mid November.

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

## NEPAL

Without a doubt this country is a potpourri of culture and diversity. It boasts as having the highest mountain in the world Mt Everest mixed with unique wildlife and exotic culture. Discover yourself amidst this strange world of mystical beliefs and incredible history. Every aspect of life is tainted with spiritual reasons. From morning prayers to the universal deities, walking Sadhus on village trails and city streets, to Buddhists spinning prayer wheels while sitting in front of their stores. You will have many opportunities to witness this aspect of life, and to share with people your own ideas about it. The art and craft of Nepal are basically based on the religious themes taken from Buddhism and Hinduism. Nepalese art has been influenced and promoted since the earliest recorded times by the Newars. In Nepal, ethnical cultural groups are diverse and many of them have their own languages and customs. The country's capital Kathmandu and largest city simultaneously reeks of history and the wear and tear of increasing modernity. The tightly packed historical centre, with its squares and temples, continues to preserve a world light years away from shantytowns, expensive hotels, restaurants and shops on the city's outskirts. Kathmandu's core is Durbar Square, with the Vishnumati River to the west and Ratna Park to the east, The Bagmati River forms the southern boundary, whilst Thamel, the popular tourist hangout sprawls to the north. This would have to be one of the most exciting cities in the world today.

## Itinerary

### Day 1 - ARRIVE /PARO

Departure time with Druk Air 00630. Arrival time in Paro 0800

Fly into Himalayas with Druk Air, Bhutan's National Air Carrier. Your escort who will be accompanying you will greet you on arrival at the airport. After completion of airport formalities, you will transfer to your hotel. Arrive Paro approx. 9.30am. Upon arrival at Paro International Airport, you will be welcomed to the Kingdom by your guide. Transfer to your vehicle for the 2 hours scenic drive to the capital of Thimphu which is situated on the Pa Chu (Paro River) Transfer to your hotel to freshen up. After lunch it is full afternoons sightseeing to such places as Heritage Cultural Centre and the Paper Factory. As you had a long and exhausting flight the remainder of the afternoon is free to relax or explore Thimphu. **Overnight Hotel (BLD)**

### Day 2 THIMPU - SIGHTSEEING

There are many places of interest to visit in Thimphu and your Bhutanese guide will take you to those places which are of interest to the group as the indigenous hospital specializing in herbal medicine and the School of Fine Arts. . After lunch you will take a short hike to visit the beautiful Cheri Monastery one of the most popular monastery's in Bhutan, on the return journey you will be taken to see Bhutan's National animal the Tarkin. **(BLD) (Monday)**

### DAY 3 -THIMPU – GANGTEY - GANTEY TREK 3 DAY TREK

Drive to the town of Wangdi on the way visiting the Wangdi Dzong, you then follow the Phobjika valley to the start of your trek. **Overnight Local Hotel (BLD) (Tuesday)**

**DAY 4 GANGTE - GOGONA Distance : Time : 5 Hours. Altitude of camp : 3000m.** Begin the trek with the pack ponies and the trekking staff. The trail winds through the meadows and fields. The gentle climb takes you through mixed forests of juniper, bamboo, magnolia and rhododendron. **Overnight Camp (BLD) (Wednesday)**

**DAY 5 GOGONA - KHOTOKHA Distance : Trek time : 5 hours.** Altitude of camp : 3200m

A gentle climb leads to the Shobjula Pass ( 3390m). The descent from the pass leads to a wide valley surrounded by beautiful mountains. **Overnight Camp (BLD) (Thursday)**

**DAY 6 KHOTOKHA – CHUZOMSA – PUNARKA Distance : Trek Time : 4 hours** A short ascent will bring you to the Tashila pass - 2780m. Then the descent is through an ever changing landscape into the drainage of the Dangchhu Stream. This is possibly the most difficult and challenging part of your trek as it is down hill for approx. 4 hours on uneven and sometimes steep trail but you will be rewarded at the end as your transportation and a cold drink will be waiting for you at the motor road in Chhuzomsa. Transfer to Punakha and your lodge accommodation in time for lunch. **Overnight in Hotel (BLD) Friday)**

#### **DAY 07 PUNARKA**

Today you will visit the famous Punarka Dzong and Chimi Lhakdang, the divine mad monk's temple. It is a beautiful walk through a lovely village. The temple can be visited and there is a tree outside which is supposed to have sprouted up after Drukpa Kunley sent a thunderbolt from an adjoining valley to kill some evil spirits who had gathered at the site. **Overnight Hotel (BLD) (Saturday)**

**DAY 08 PUNARKA – BHUMTANG** This is a 5- 6 hour drive depending on road conditions but it is a journey you are not likely to forget. The scenery is certainly stunning. To begin with you carry on down the highly cultivated valley to the town of Wangdiphodrang and then up towards the Pele La at 3,300 m. In places the road is literally carved out of an impressive cliff. Descending from the other side it is a long way down to Tongsa, which can be clearly seen for many miles in the distance. It has the largest monastery fortress in the kingdom and it was from here that the present royal family emerged as the most powerful force at the beginning of this century. **Overnight Hotel (BLD) (Sunday)**

#### **Day `09 BHUMTANG - SIGHTSEEING**

Today is a full day exploring this magnificent valley; hike to Tamshing Gomba, the most important Nyigma Gomba with a visit to the Yatha weaving center. It may also be possible to take some of the local village walks a visit to the homeopathic hospital, the cheese factory, the castle of the 'White Bird', one or two local temples and a walk around Jakar Township. Also worth seeing in Jakar are the woodcraft workshop, dying workshop, and the five water wheels behind Wangdicholing Old Palace. Overnight lodge, Jakar. **(Monday) Overnight Hotel**

#### **Day 10 BUMTHANG – GANTEY**

On the way to Gangtey watch different altitude species of birds. Gangtey is a place where one can find black necked cranes, which migrate from Tibet in November and return in March every year. We visit Gangtey Monastery and Trongsa Dzong **(Tuesday) (BLD)**

**DAY 11 GANTEY – THIMPU – PARO** - Return by the same road to Thimpu for lunch. Free afternoon in Thimpu to do that last minute shopping before driving to Paro **Overnight Hotel (BLD) (Wed)**

#### **Day 12 PARO**

After breakfast you will be taken to the start of the trailhead to the famous Taksing Monastery. You have the option of either hiking the 4 or your guide can hire a horse to take you to the viewpoint and then it is a short easy walk to the Monastery where you will be granted access into the monastery. Return to Paro for lunch and in the afternoon you will be taken on a visit of the Fort, National Museum and Paro Dzong. **(BLD) Overnight Hotel (Thursday)**

### **Day 13 PARO – KATHMANDU**

After breakfast transfer to the airport for your flight to Kathmandu. On arrival in Kathmandu you will be met by your guide and transferred to your hotel in BHAKTAPUR: Bhaktapur meaning the City of Devotees, this place is the home of medieval art and architecture. Lying 14km/9 miles east of Kathmandu City, this place was founded in the 9th century and is shaped like a conch shell. The city is at the height of 5,600ft above sea level. In Bhadgaon you will visit the Durbar Square with its array of temples overlooked by the Palace of 55 Windows built by King Bhupatindra Malla, The Nyatapola Temple. This temple also built by King Bhupatindra Malla, is the best example of the Pagoda style and stands on five terraces on each of which stands a pair of figures, two famous strong men, two elephants, two lions, two griffins and two goddesses. Dinner at your hotel. Overnight Hotel (BD) Day 14 KATHMANDU - NARGAKOT Early morning sightseeing tour of Bhaktapur a visit to the museum of Thangka painting can also be considered. A 30-minute walk brings you to the Dattatraya temple and Pujari Math At approx. 3pm depart for your 2 hour drive to Nagarkot. Nargakot is a hill station situated approx 2 hours drive from Kathmandu at an altitude of 2073m, it is a very popular and lovely place for a superb views of the Himalayas, sun rise and sun set and views of surrounding valley. **Overnight Hotel (BLD)**

**Day 15 NARGAKOT – POKHARA** - After breakfast you will be accompanied by your guide on a short walk through local villages and farmland to the famous Chananyayan Temple. The walk is mostly downhill on a well defined walking track. You will lunch at a local restaurant near the temple. Your car will then take you back to Kathmandu visiting on the way Pashupatinath, the most famous Hindu temple in the country, located on the banks of the holy Bagmati river. Here you will see Hindu holymen (or Sardhus), pilgrims bathing, and occasionally funeral pyres burning on the ghats. It is then a short trip to Bouddanath the famous Buddhist Stupa Afternoon flight to Pokhara. **Transfer to your hotel Overnight Hotel (B)**

**Day 16 POKHARA** This morning your guide will take you on a boat trip across the lake and hike 1 hour to the Buddhist Peace Temple, you will return to your hotel via the Tibetan Refugee Camp, Devis Falls and the Himalayan Climbing Museum.. The remainder of the day is yours to enjoy at your leisure. You may wish to do some last minute shopping for your trek or pack your kitty bag for the following day's departure **(B)**

### **Day 17 POKHARA - - JOMSOM**

Early flight to Jomsom (2720 mtrs) and trek to Kagbeni (2950 mtrs) (5 Hours walk)

Fly to Jomsom where we pick up our Nepalese staff for the trek. We then depart on our first walk in Nepal, the Kaligandaki valley here is called the Thakkhola, after the native Thakalis, who are distantly related to the Tibetans and it is the most spectacular valley in Nepal. We arrive at our Lodge at Kagbeni you will have time to walk around this fascinating village. This village used to be fortified with walls and tunnel gates like this in the past, mostly during the time when salt trade route was in operation. However, this has changed now. Salt trade does not exist anymore and it has become an important tourist and pilgrimage destination. **(BLD) Overnight Lodge**

### **Day 18 JOMSOM - JARKOT (3 hours)**

Today is a short steep climb for approx 1 hr then we gradually ascend to the village of jarkot. After lunch we will hike to the pilgrimage village of Muktinath. **(BLD) Overnight Lodge**

### **Day 19 JARKOT – MARPHA**

After breakfast we will ascend by the same trail to Jomsom (option to ride a mountain pony this is excellent fun and thoroughly recommended). We arrive in Jomsom for lunch and the afternoon we hike on a flat easy trail to the beautiful apple growing village of Marpha. **(BLD) (Overnight Lodge)**

**Day 20 MARPHA –JOMSOM - POKHARA** Early morning departure to Jomsom and our flight to Pokhara. Free afternoon in Pokhara to sightsee or shop. **(BLD) Overnight hotel**

### **Day 21 POKHARA – KATHMANDU**

This morning we will depart by tourist bus to Kathmandu approx 5 hour drive through amazing rugged scenery. Transfer to your hotel in the tourist district of Thamel. (B) overnight hotel

### **Day 22 KATHMANDU – Free Day Kathmandu included is some sightseeing (B)**

### **Day 23 KATHMANDU –END OF TRIP (B)**

### **LAND COST: US\$4230**

- All Airport Transfers
- Excellent ground transport in Bhutan
- 3 very clean comfortable traditional hotels and guest houses twin share accom.
- All camping equipment and food and horse support. Guide cooking team
- 3 first class meals per day whilst in Bhutan
- Bottled Mineral Water in Bhutan
- Bhutan Visa
- All Sightseeing
- Entry into all Monasteries
- 3\* accom. Whilst in Baktapur/Nargakot/Pokhara/Kathmandu including b'fast
- 3 internal flights in Nepal
- tourist bus Pokhara/Kathmandu
- English speaking Bhutanese and Nepalese guides
- 4 day fully supported all inclusive trek with lodge accom including food in Nepal
- Comprehensive Trip Notes
- Australian Group Leader

### **Not Included:**

- International airfares Sydney/Bangkok/Paro/Kathmandu/Sydney approx Aust \$2150 including taxes
- Soft and Hard Drinks'
- Airport Taxes International US\$25 from Paro
- Gratitudes