

## CASTLES IN THE AIR (12 DAYS)



*Castles in the Air, Experiences and Journeys in Unknown Bhutan, by John Claude White, C.I.E., Late Political Officer of Sikkim, Bhutan and of such part of Tibet as fell within the sphere of British influence ” is the name of an article that appeared in The National Geographic Magazine, in 1914.*

*John Claude White wrote “on nearing the fort, a bevy of girls met us below the almost perpendicular approach and sang us into the fort (Trongsa Dzong).”*

*In this tour we will try to trace his journey, from his point of entry in Paro to Bumthang, the then political center of the first king of Bhutan.*

### ITINERARY EX PARO 17 FEBRUARY 2024

Day 01| Arrival in Paro – Thimphu (1 Hr)

Day 02| Thimphu – Punakha (2 Hrs)

Day 03| Punakha sightseeing Witness the Punakha Festival

Day 04| Punakha – Trongsa (4 Hrs)

Day 05| Trongsa – Jakar (2 Hrs)

Day 06| Jakar Sightseeing

Day 07| Jakar Sightseeing (Tang Excursion)

Day 08| Jakar – Phobjikha (4 Hrs)

Day 09| Phobjikha – Paro (5 Hrs)

Day 10| Paro Sightseeing

Day 11| Departure:

\* Itinerary can be customized as per your requirement/duration

\* Itinerary is subject to flight and hotel availability

#### **Day 01| Arrival in Paro – Thimphu (1 Hr)**

Early morning flight to Paro, Bhutan (Please check the flight timing). The flight from Delhi/Kathmandu is considered as one of the most scenic flight offering the view of the world’s top ten highest peaks. Upon your arrival in Paro airport our guide will be there to welcome you and transfer to Thimphu. After Lunch visit the Memorial Chorten (temple) built in memory of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> King. This place now happens to be a get together point for the

elderly people, who spend their whole day chanting prayers and meeting their friends. Visit Changangkha Lhakhang, the oldest temple in the valley offering a beautiful view of the valley. Enclosure where the national animal, Takins are kept and drive to visit the largest and the newly built statue of Buddha offering magnificent view of entire Thimphu valley. After 5 PM, visit the fortress of Thimphu, Tashichho Dzong, which houses the throne of the king. Evening walk around the happening town, the largest and the most crowded town in Bhutan.

**Overnight: Thimphu| Altitude: 2300m**

### **Day 02| Thimphu – Punakha (2 Hrs)**

Morning visit the happening weekend market (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) where the locals from the surrounding villages come to sell their produce. They sell their goods and in return they buy their basic necessities. In olden days, bata system was practiced by everyone. Visit the traditional Hand Made Paper Mill. Visit the School of Arts and Crafts where students learn 13 different arts used predominantly in Bhutan. Visit Folk Heritage Museum which explains how a traditional house used to be like in the olden days. Later visit the National Library which houses the collection of Bhutanese rich religious text and the contemporary Buddhism teachings from master all around the world. Drive further up to visit the Dechenphodrang monastic school and meet the young monks. Later continue to Zilukha nunnery to meet the nuns and interact with them. Lunch in the town and drive to Punakha crossing over Dochula pass (3200 mts). If the weather permits one can enjoy a spectacular breath taking view of the highest mountain peaks of Bhutan at a sight that stretches almost 180 degrees. Take a break and walk around the 108 stupas and continue to the sub tropical valley of Punakha offering a different vegetation. En route just before arriving the hotel, take a nice hike through the paddy field and old village to visit Chimi Lhakhang, the temple of fertility associated with religious art of phallus.

**Overnight: Punakha| Altitude: 1350m**



### **Day 03| Punakha Sightseeing**

Morning drive to visit Punakha Dzong (fortress), which houses the most elaborated temple in the country. This is a must to see fortress in Bhutan and a fine example of Bhutanese rich Art and Architecture. After the visit if you are in mood for a nice half-day hike, you could start the hike right above the Dzong with a short steep climb offering a great view of the valley with houses spread all around and the never ending turquoise river and it's sandy river bed. This trail is also popular for mountain biking. The hike ends through the farm field crossing the newly constructed bridge, where your car will be waiting at the other side of the river. If you choose the entire activity can be done on foot from your hotel. After lunch could go for

an hour hike (uphill) to the temple of Khamsum Yuley Lakhang overlooking the paddy field and the snakelike river bends. Or could relax in the balcony of the hotel to enjoy the view and the nature.

**Overnight: Punakha**



**Day 04 Punakha Festival**

We will spend whole day in the festival which will accompany with various mask dances and folk dancers along with jokers actions in the crowd.

Overnight at Punakha

**Day 05| Punakha – Trongsa (4 Hrs)**

If you are staying in hotel Meri Puensum, hotel Zandopelri or hotel Densa, early morning it will be a treat to walk up to the hilltop to visit the nunnery and interact with the nuns and enjoy the magnificent view of Punakha and Wangdi valley. Later after breakfast start your drive for Trongsa. En route could stop for a short hike to the ancient village of Rinchengang overlooking the ruins of Wangdi Dzong. It's amazing how they have managed to be together and preserve the old houses. If you are tired to hike, could do it on the way back. Cross over Pelela Pass at 3,300m which forms the part of Black mountain range that divides the country into east and west. Enroute could take a short break and go for short hike to the remote village of Rukubji or Chendibji. The drive is long but the landscape is picturesque and worth. Upon arrival relax in the hotel.

**Overnight: Trongsa| Altitude: 2200m**

**Day 06| Trongsa – Jakar (2 Hrs)**

Morning walk through the single lane town of Trongsa and visit the majestic Trongsa Dzong (Fortress), the home of the royals. Historically Trongsa Dzong is the most important Dzong and the largest as well. Also must visit the Ta Dzong, an ancient watchtower, which houses a unique museum. Later start driving for Jakar, crossing over Yotong La pass at 3,400m. After a short descend en route just before arriving Jakar, stop in Chumi valley, the weaving place, by the roadside where “Yatha” (wool weaving) is woven here which Bumthang is famous for. Continue your drive for Jakar crossing over Kiki La pass and finally descending to Jakar valley.

**Overnight: Jakar| Altitude: 2650m**

### **Day 07| Jakar Sightseeing**

Bumthang province consists of four different valleys know as Chumi, Jakar, Tang and Ura. This province is the most historical and one of the holiest places in Bhutan with so many temples and holy sites spread all around the province. Jakar is a beautiful valley and if you want to take a break and avoid driving, today's activity can be entirely done on foot. Visit Jampay Lakhang, one of the first two Buddhist temples built in the country. Visit Kurjey lakhang temple, one of the holiest site in Bhutan, this is also the site where the royals are cremated. Cross the suspension bridge follow the dirt road and through the village of Parar and visit Tamshing lakhang temple. End your day with a walk passing by the Swiss farm. If time permits visit the Jakar Dzong offering beautiful view of the valley. Evening stroll in Jakar town and try some local pancake and noodles.

**Overnight: Jakar**

### **Day 08| Jakar Sightseeing (Tang Excursion)**

Morning after breakfast drive to the remote isolated village of Tang, due to it's remoteness, very few tourists get to visit this village. The landscape is beautiful crossing through many small villages. Just before reaching Tang village, if you want to avoid driving, you have an option to take a shortcut by crossing the bridge and walk for about half an hour to the O'Chholing palace, the ancestral home to the royal family of Tang region which is converted into a museum. Visit the unique museum of O'Chholing, which has very fine and unique collection of Bhutanese Arts and Artifacts. It covers and explains about all the history and details of Tang village activities during the olden days. Hot lunch in the museum guest house. Enjoy the calmness and the beautiful view of the Tang valley. Walk around the tiny village, meeting the locals, the shy children and interacting with them. Later to drive back to Jakar.

**Overnight: Jakar**



### **Day 09| Jakar – Phobjikha (4 Hrs)**

Morning start retracing your drive to the remote isolated valley of Phobjikha passing by Trongsa town and crossing over Pele La pass. The drive is very picturesque and worth every turn and climb. This valley is protected being winter home for the endangered Black Necked Cranes migrating to Bhutan every end of Oct to end of Feb. This valley is a paradise for the nature lovers and hikers. There are many trails such as the Phobjikha Nature trail hike (2.5 Hrs), which offers beautiful view of the valley. It starts from the valley and end with Gangtey Goempa temple at the hilltop overlooking the valley. Or if you are too tired after the long drive, could relax in the hotel and enjoy the breathtaking view of the valley. This is a very remote village and the hotel standard is very basic. Farm house stay optional.

**Overnight: Phobjikha| Altitude: 2900m**

### **Day10| Phobjikha – Paro (5 Hrs)**

Morning could go for walk right below your hotel and meet the school children who all walk for hours to reach their nearest school. Later after breakfast retrace the drive back to Paro. Upon arrival in Paro, if time permits, visit Paro Dzong (Fortress) on foot and continue walking through the oldest wooden bridge still in use. Continue further to stroll around the old Paro town and peep into some local handicrafts stores. Could get some opportunity to see the traditional game, Archery match going on. Evening back to the hotel.

**Overnight: Paro| Altitude: 2200m**

### **Day 11| Paro Sightseeing**

Morning drive to the base for the hike (3 hrs uphill) to Tiger's Nest, the most revered temple in the country that literally hangs on a granite cliff overlooking the Paro valley. Most of the day will go on the hike. On the way back, if you have the energy and time visit the Kichu Lakhang, one of the oldest temples in Bhutan which marks the beginning of Buddhism in the country. Hot stone bath available at an additional cost. Farewell dinner with your guide.

**Overnight: Paro**

### **Day 12| Departure**

Morning transfer (15 mins) to the airport for your departure flight. Your guide will bid you farewell at the airport.

### **Some useful Bhutanese phrases**

Hello: Ku-zu-zam-po-la (meaning good health)  
Thank You: Ka din chey la  
See you: Lok jey gay  
Good bye: Lus la "or" Laso la

**Cost Per person Twin Share USD4825**

### **What's Included**

- Accommodation on twin sharing basis in 3-star standard hotels
- 3 delicious meals a day
- English speaking guide
- Visa arrangement
- Government royalty and taxes
- Transportation and sightseeing as per the itinerary
- Museum visiting fees

- **Bottled drinking water throughout the trip**

#### Not Included

##### International flights

- Personal Expenses & laundry
- Gratitude to guide, driver, bell boy, trekking crew etc
- Travel insurance