

* Tribal Trust Foundation and the Monpa Festival *

Bhutan

TRIP DATES: December 6-18, 2019

START: PARO, BHUTAN

FINISH: PARO, BHUTAN

Ringed by the staggering peaks of the Himalaya, Bhutan is a remote Buddhist kingdom where age-old traditions hold strong. Amid verdant valleys dotted with historic fortresses and shrines, delve into Bhutan's rich culture with a private guide, discovering how everyday life is intertwined with Mahayana Buddhism. Meet with monks, nuns, farmers, and artisans; take part in ancient rituals; and witness firsthand the cautious evolution of this tiny kingdom.

Visit the Living Edens of Bhutan, the Monpas and participate in the inaugural of their festival. Immerse yourselves and understand the way of living of the Monpas whilst living with them.

Day 1- December 6 : Arrive Paro Paro (9,800 ft)

- **Flight: KB 150 DEP 08:00 Hrs & Arrival 12:10 Hrs**

As we approach Bhutan, we see the massive peaks of the eastern Himalaya, including Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest peak, and Jhomolhari, Bhutan's holy mountain. Upon arrival in the Paro Valley and after completing visa formalities, your Bhutanese guide and driver will be waiting outside of the terminal to receive and escort you to our accommodations for the evening.

We begin our spiritual journey with a powerful butter lamp lighting ceremony at the 8th Century Kyichu Temple. The ceremony is performed to embark on a journey with safe passage throughout the kingdom. We will then stretch our legs on a short walk/hike back to our hotel following a farm road.

In the evening we will have an orientation and Welcome dinner

- Accommodation: Zhiwaling Heritage, Paro (1 night)
- Meals: B(inflight), L,D



Zhiwa Ling Heritage, Paro

Bhutanese owned and staffed, the Zhiwa Ling Heritage is set on 10 acres in the Paro Valley, within easy reach of Bhutan's most revered temples and monasteries. From its traditional Bhutanese architecture to its elegant temple made with 450-year-old timbers to its Swedish under-floor heating, the hotel seamlessly combines past and present.

<http://www.zhiwalingheritage.com>

Day 2- December 7: Fly to Bumthang, Spiritual Heartland of Bhutan

- **Flight: KB010 DEPARTURE 07 :30 Hrs ARRIVAL 08:05 Hrs**

This morning we take a short mountain flight to Bumthang. This flight offers spectacular views of the Himalayas and the valleys beneath crafted by the rivers that flow from the glaciers forming rich and fertile lands for settlements. To the right of the plain, the Black Mountain range is prominent. At the foothills of it lies the Monpa land that we shall visit in the next few days.

Once in Jakar Valley, we check into our hotel and freshen up. We then explore the 7th Century Jampa Temple and onwards to Kurje Lhakhang, where three temples are surrounded by 108 stupas. From Kurje we set off on foot to Tamshing Lhakhang, founded in 1501 by Pema Lingpa, a blacksmith from Bumthang who became one of Bhutan's most revered Buddhist saints and teachers. Our walk wraps up at the Swiss Farm, a development project started in the 1960s when Swiss cheese-maker Fritz Maurer brought his skills to Bhutan.

Day 3- December 8: Explore Bumthang Valley

After a delicious breakfast, we drive a couple of hours to arrive in the buckwheat growing valley of Tang, one of the four valleys of Bumthang. Tang combines immense natural beauty with a history of hosting the greatest collection of eminent spiritual practitioners. One such spiritual leader, Longchen Rabjam, and his descendants have built the Ogyenchoeling, the palace of bliss. We will take a tour of this now private museum.

En route we visit the Pemachholing Nunnery, home to ~300 Buddhist nuns and practitioners of the powerful drum ceremony. The hymns from the Buddhist text are sang in tune with the hand-held drum and bell. We may interact with some of the few English-speaking nuns to understand their ordained lives and their choice to live in celibacy.

We have an opportunity for a short hike to the Burning Lake, or Mebartsho, where the king of treasure revealers, Pema Lingpa, is said to have performed his first miracle.

- Accommodation: Rinchen Ling Lodge (2 nights)
- Meals: B,L,D



RinchenLing Lodge, Bumthang

Matching the beauty, solemnity and serenity of Bhutan's mythical district Bumthang, Rinchenling Guest House is a one-stop resort. Five minute walk from one of the Kingdom's most sacred sites, Jampa Lhakhang, Rinchenling symbolizes the Bhutanese spirit in all aspects, from its architectural designs to the facilities

<http://www.rinchenling.com/>

Day 4- December 9 : Bumthang to Trongsa to Jangbi's Monpa Community



We drive from Bumthang to Trongsa across the Yutong La ("la" means "pass") of 11,300 ft. Our 2-hour journey on the newly constructed road is scenic and may have some wildlife sightings. Reaching the bustling village of Trongsa, we proceed further south for about 3 hours, taking a farm road to the village of Jangbi, where the Monpa reside and our home for the next two nights.

The local community of Monpa people, led by the resident Buddhist monk, will welcome us with folk song and dances and offering of fruits and local wines. This is special that now opens their homes for us for the next two days we learn from them.

Our Bhutanese guide will present a camp orientation.

Day 5- December 10: Monpa Festival Showcasing local Culture and Monpa lives.

The Monpas practiced Bon or Shamanism long before the advent of Buddhism. The resident monk has been appointed by the government to benefit the people in their spiritual pursuit of happiness. The few shaman masters do visit this village, reach out to the spirit world and channel these transcendental energies into the lives of the Monpas. This has a huge influence on their lives as Buddhism or Shamanism is not a religion but a way of life here.

Today is an exciting day for us in the Monpa community! We peek into the lives of the Monpa people through firsthand experience. Our activities include visiting homes and pounding rice, cooking demonstration and making wooden utensils, ploughing the fields with traditional equipment, grinding corn with traditional mill, rope making, traditional carrying stand and

stretcher, traditional monpa soap, participating in various farm tasks and interacting with the Monpa people.

After a day filled with learning and knowledge, the Monpas will proudly demonstrate their traditional Monpa tribal dance. The night will be followed by story telling of Monpa healing practices by Ap Tawchu (healer) and if you are interested the healer may find out your problems and root out the probable cause of pain in your body.

- Accommodation: Tented Camp (2 nights)
- Meals: B,L,D



Deluxe Tented Camp

In the beautiful setting of the Monpa land and seasonal flowers, you camp will have sleeping cots, sleeping bags, carpets and common flush toilets. The camp set up also consist of shower facilities and the traditional hot stone herbal bath.

Meals will be prepared by camp staff trained in hygiene and experts in local cuisines, western and continental dishes.

Day 6- December 11: Jangbi to Trongsa, Birthplace of Bhutanese Monarchy

We bid farewell to our newfound Monpa family in Jangbi and retrace our journey back to Trongsa. In Trongsa, we visit the Monarchy Museum housed in the Trongsa Taa Dzong, or watchtower. This watchtower stands on a promontory above the town and once guarded Trongsa Dzong from internal rebellion. Built in the 17th Century, it houses a shrine dedicated to the epic hero, King Gesar of Ling. The watchtower was converted into a museum dedicated to the monarchies of Bhutan and provides an insight into the significance of Trongsa in Bhutan's history.



- Accommodation: Yangkhil Resort (1 Night)
- Meals: B,L,D



Yangkhil Resort, Trongsa

The resort features lush green and colorful gardens, fish pond, breathtaking panoramic view of Trongsa Dzong, Taa Dzong, Mangde Chhu (river) and the view of mountains soaring over 10,000 feet create an unforgettable setting at Yangkhil Resort. A relaxed country-club atmosphere within the establishment create an ideal place for guest seeking solitude or relaxation.

<http://www.yangkhil.bt/>

Day 7- December 12: Trongsa to the Crane Valley

We depart for the stunning Phobjikha Valley. Our three (3) hour route climbs from the subtropical greenery of Trongsa to alpine regions featuring vast hemlock and rhododendron forests. This valley is home to the endangered black-necked cranes and the conservation efforts of Bhutan and WWF have created a safe haven for these beautiful birds, which flock the marshy wetlands in winter for roosting.

After arriving and a delectable lunch, we will visit Gangtey Monastery and Crane Center. We will also undertake a short hike around the valley observing the beauty of the glacial valley, its inhabitants and the black-necked cranes.

Day 8- December 13: Explore Gangtey Valley

In the morning embark on a nature trail hike along the ridge of Phobjikha valley. The trail is gentle and easy through pinewoods and countryside and whole of the time keeping yourselves along the ridge and wetlands onto your right. Submerge yourself with nature and look out for closer spots to see the cranes in the valley. The hiking trail ends at Khewang Lhakhang, one of the oldest temples in the valley and today monastic school for the monks. The car will pick up and drive you to Khebethang village where you will see clustered of Bhutanese houses. Visit one of the farmhouse to get a glimpse of rural Bhutan and interaction with the families.

Afternoon visit a community school in Beta where students at this time will be busy gearing up for the National Day celebration. Drive back to your lodge and free time. In the evening attend evening prayer ceremony being performed daily by the monks in Gangtey Shedra (Buddhist College) and concluding with half an hour Q&A session with one of the teacher here

- Accommodation: Dewachen Hotel (2 nights)
- Meals: B,L,D



Dewachen Hotel,Gangtey

Encircled by pine forests in the hidden valley of Phobjikha – Ganter Gompa, home to the very rare Black Necked cranes, the Dewachen Hotel features 28 double rooms, modern bathroom fittings, heavenly bedding comforts, and a restaurant with a magnificent view and the finest cuisine prepared by a professional chef.

<https://www.dewachenhospitality.com/hotel/dewachen-hotel-spa/>

Day 9- December 14: Drive to Thimphu Via Punakha

Our drive to Punakha, the ancient Capital of Bhutan, is quite scenic. You will notice the change in vegetation from alpine highland to cactus-growing rich valleys of Wangdi and Punakha. En route to Punakha, visit the breathtaking Punakha Dzong, dominating the confluence of two rivers. Built in 1637 by Zhabdrung Rinpoche, Unifier of Bhutan, this massive fortress is one of the holiest in Bhutan, holding some of the most sacred relics including the preserved remains of Zhabdrung himself. The central monk body of Bhutan moves from Thimphu to Punakha every winter to take advantage of Punakha's temperate climate. Lunchtime welcomes a picnic lunch near the Mo Chhu ("Mo" means "mother" or "female") at our private picnic area.

Finally drive to Thimphu climbing up towards magnificent Dochula Pass at 10,000 ft with an amazing views of the eastern himalayas. Bhutan's capital and largest city, Thimphu is home to the government, royal family, and the head offices of international aid organizations. It is a mix of Himalayan and Western sensibilities—internet cafés and discos abound. Local shops entice

with traditional weavings; Tibetan and Bhutanese silverwork; coral and turquoise beads; and prayer flags. A number of cottage industries, including metalworking and paper making, are found in Thimphu, and visitors often enjoy visiting their workshops to see artisans practicing their craft.

Day 10- December 15: Explore Thimphu Valley

Today's option of sights include:

Textile Museum - This museum showcases the textile arts of Bhutan including the exquisite Royal robes donned by Their Majesties the King and Queen at the Royal Wedding in 2012.

Folk Heritage Museum - This is a traditional farmhouse in its original state. One gains insight into the village life of a local farmer, which remains unchanged in much of rural Bhutan.

Memorial Chorten - This large stupa was built in memory of the Third King of Bhutan and is the site of public religious activity. Young and old alike, at all hours, are seen circumambulating this stupa.

Buddha Dordenma - A familiar site and known to be the largest Buddha statue in the World, it is perched atop a hill protectively overlooking the Thimphu Valley below.

Tashichho Dzong - This is the seat of the government and houses the offices of His Majesty. This is the summer home of the central monk body that moves to Punakha in the winter months.

Or we simply walk the main streets of Norzin Lam shopping for Souvenirs from Bhutan.

On our second evening in Thimphu, we are honored to meet, dine and converse with Bhutanese dignitaries on topics of interest and make new friends in Bhutan.

- Accommodation: Zhiwaling Heritage, Paro (2 nights)
- Meals: B,L,D



Zhiwaling Ascent, Thimphu

Zhiwaling Ascent is located just outside the center of the capital city in a park like setting with panoramic views. This contemporary concept hotel, which is the first of its kind in Bhutan, has 20 spacious rooms designed in the most energy efficient way to capture sunlight all day and provides superb views of the surrounding scenery. Like its sister hotel in Paro, it is wholly Bhutanese owned and operated

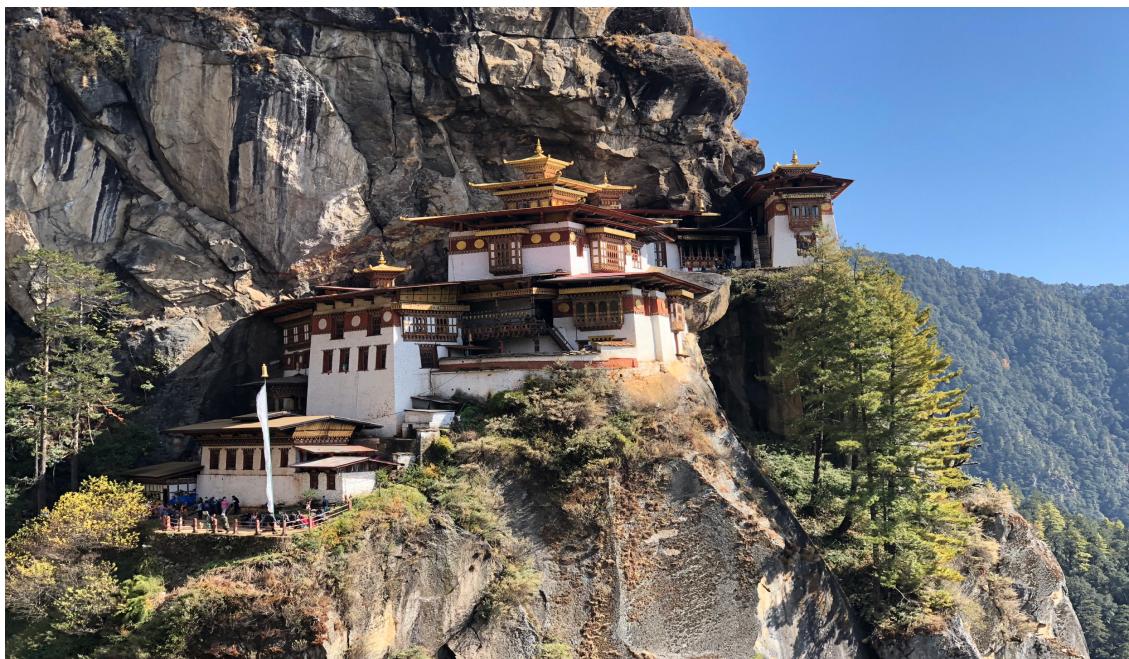
<http://www.zhiwalingascent.com/>

Day 11- December 16: Drive to Paro

Today after breakfast we will drive to Paro. Our drive to Paro lays on the banks of the Pa Chhu (“chhu” means “river”), which winds through the bucolic Paro Valley, once the hub for trade with Tibet. Our first stop is the Paro Rimpung Dzong. We’ll ascend a short hill behind to reach the Ta Dzong, a circular fortress that once protected this valley from Tibetan invasion. The impressive watchtower commands sweeping views of the valley below. It used to house Bhutan’s National Museum, which, since 1968, has been the home of the country’s most cherished relics.

Scroll in the town of Paro for the souvenirs and gifts for the friends and family’s back home. We bask in the luxury of the hotel in preparation for the challenging but doable hike tomorrow to the Taktsang Monastery.

Day 12 – December 17: Hike to Taktsang, Tiger’s Nest



We embark on an invigorating morning hike to Taktsang Monastery, Tiger’s Nest, one of the most iconic and venerated Buddhist monuments in the Himalayas. Set into a cliff face 2,600 ft. above the Paro Valley, the Tiger’s Nest takes its name from a mythical journey made by Lord Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche, who flew there on a tigress’ back in order to meditate for three months and convert the valley to Buddhism. Many of Buddhism’s most influential figures have paid homage to this site.

The hike is about 1.5 hours and well worth the effort! About halfway up, we stop at a teahouse and the view from there alone is well worth the climb. Another 45 minutes brings you all the way to the gompa. The main building of Taktsang was badly damaged in a fire, and underwent a major restoration in 2003.

In the afternoon, we soak in the luxury of the hotel and or explore and shop in Paro town. In the evening, we celebrate our journey and new friends with a delectable farewell dinner at our beautiful hotel.

- Accommodation: Zhiwaling Heritage, Paro (2 nights)
- Meals: B,L,D



Zhiwa Ling Heritage, Paro

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<http://www.zhiwalingheritage.com>

Day 13- December 18: Depart from Paro International Airport

***Flight:** KB 152 DEP 16:10 HRS & ARR 20:20 HRS

We depart this morning to Bangkok. Your guide will escort you to the airport and your journey to the magical land of Gross National Happiness comes to an end.

Tashi Delek!