12 Days Bhutan Tour

Twelve days lets the journey breathe on the way back as well as out. Where shorter itineraries return west in one long push, this one pauses in Punakha for the walk through rice terraces to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten - a temple built by the Queen Mother above a silver bend of the Mo Chhu - and stops at Kuengarabtan's palace en route from Bumthang. Add the Tango Monastery hike above Thimphu and the Tiger's Nest finale, and you have our most contemplative itinerary: three proper hikes, the kingdom's holiest valleys, and enough slack in the schedule to sit in a temple courtyard for an hour because you feel like it. For travellers treating Bhutan less as a destination than as a retreat.

LOCATION	DURATION
Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Phobjikha, Trongsa, Bumthang, Ura	**12**

Highlights

- Buddha Dordenma - 51m tall statue
- Takin Preserve Center
- School of 13 Arts and Crafts
- Dochula Pass - 108 chortens (3,140m)
- Chimi Lhakhang - Temple of Fertility
- Punakha Dzong - Palace of Great Happiness
- Phobjikha Valley - Black-necked Crane habitat
- Gangtey Gompa
- Trongsa Dzong - Royal ancestral home
- Trongsa Museum (Ta Dzong)
- Jakar Dzong - Castle of White Bird
- Jambay Lhakhang - 7th century temple
- Kurjey Lhakhang - Body print of Guru Rinpoche
- Tamshing Lhakhang - Founded by Pema Lingpa
- Burning Lake (Mebar Tsho)
- Ura Valley & Temple
- Kuengarabtan Palace
- Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten hike
- Tango Monastery hike
- Cheri Monastery
- Tashichho Dzong
- National Library & Folk Heritage Museum
- National Museum (Ta Dzong) Paro
- Rinpung Dzong

- Tiger's Nest Monastery hike (2,600m to 3,100m)
- Kyichu Lhakhang - 7th century temple

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Paro - Drive to Thimphu

Paro to Thimphu | 2,320m | 1.5 hrs | 54 km

You will be received by a representative from Byways Tours and Travels at the airport and driven to Thimphu.

After lunch, visit **Buddha Dordenma**, the tallest Buddha statue in the world at 51 meters. Then visit the **Takin Preserve Center** to see Bhutan's national animal, followed by the **Nunnery** and the **School of 13 Arts and Crafts (Zorig Chusum)**, famous for traditional carving and freehand art. Here you will find students whose aptitude is more artistic than academic. After lunch, visit the **authentic Bhutanese Craft Market**. In the evening, stroll around Thimphu City for shopping. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: L/D | Hotel in Thimphu

Day 2: Thimphu to Punakha via Dochula Pass

Thimphu to Punakha | 1,200m | 3 hrs | 77 km

After breakfast, drive to Punakha Valley via **Dochula Pass (3,140m)**. We stop at the pass to admire the 108 memorial chortens, and if the weather is clear, you will enjoy spectacular views of the Himalayan ranges.

Upon reaching Punakha Valley, visit **Chimi Lhakhang**, also known as the Temple of Fertility, built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley (the Divine Madman) in the 15th century. Then visit **Punakha Dzong**, built in 1637 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, beautifully situated at the confluence of the Pho Chu (Male River) and Mo Chu (Female River). For many years until the reign of the second king, it served as Bhutan's capital. The Dzong was named **Druk Pungthang Dechen Phodrang**, meaning Palace of Great Happiness. Punakha remains the winter residence of the **Chief Abbot (Je Khenpo)**. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Punakha

Day 3: Punakha to Phobjikha Valley

Punakha to Phobjikha | 2,900m | 3 hrs | 78 km

After breakfast, drive to **Phobjikha Valley** (approximately 2 hours 30 minutes) via **Wangduephodrang**. Along the way, stop to photograph the reconstruction of **Wangduephodrang Dzong**, which was destroyed by fire in 2012.

In Phobjikha, visit **Gangtey Gompa**, founded in 1613 by Gyaltse Pema Thinley, the grandson and mind reincarnation of Pema Lingpa. If interested, enjoy a beautiful 45-minute hike from Gangtey Gompa to the valley floor. Then visit the **Black-Necked Crane Center**, where you can observe these rare migratory birds through telescopes. Black-necked cranes winter in Bhutan and return to the Tibetan Plateau in summer. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Phobjikha

Day 4: Phobjikha to Trongsa to Bumthang

Phobjikha to Trongsa to Bumthang | 2,580m | 6 hrs | 196 km

After breakfast, drive to Trongsa. Visit **Trongsa Museum (Ta Dzong)**, a former watchtower converted into a museum in 2008. Then visit **Trongsa Dzong**, built in 1643 by Chogyel Minjur Tempa. The official name is **Chhoekhor Raptentse Dzong**, also known as **Choetse Dzong**. Trongsa Dzong is the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family—the first two hereditary kings ruled from here, and tradition dictates that the crown prince serve as Trongsa Penlop before ascending to the throne. The current king became Trongsa Penlop in 2004.

After lunch, continue driving to Bumthang Valley. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Bumthang

Day 5: Bumthang Valley Sightseeing

Bumthang | 2,580m | Full day | —

After breakfast, visit **Jakar Dzong** (Castle of White Bird). Legend has it that when lamas assembled in 1549 to select a monastery site, a large white bird rose and settled on a hill spur—an important omen. The current structure was built in 1667 with a circumference of over 1,500 meters. Its official name is Yuelay Namgyal Dzong.

Visit **Jambay Lhakhang**, believed to have been built in 659 AD by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, the same day as Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro. Continue to **Kurjey Lhakhang**, named after the body print of Guru Rinpoche (**Kur** means body, **Jey** means print).

After lunch, visit **Tamshing Lhakhang**, established in 1501 by the great saint Pema Lingpa. Also known as **Tamshing Lhendup Chholing** (Temple of Good Message), it is one of the most important Nyingma monasteries in the kingdom. Finally, visit the **Burning Lake (Mebar Tsho)**. Stroll around the small town of Bumthang in the evening. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Bumthang

Day 6: Day Trip to Ura Valley

Bumthang to Ura to Bumthang | 3,100m | 1.5 hrs | 45 km

After breakfast, embark on an excursion to the beautiful **Ura Valley** and visit the **Ura Temple**. Ura is the highest of Bumthang's valleys and is believed by some to have been home to the earliest inhabitants of Bhutan. It remains one of the most isolated valleys in the kingdom.

Enjoy lunch at a traditional farmhouse. After lunch, explore Ura Valley before driving back to Bumthang. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Bumthang

Day 7: Bumthang to Punakha via Kuengarabtan Palace

Bumthang to Punakha | 2,580m | Full day | —

After breakfast, drive to Punakha. At Trongsa, visit **Kuengarabtan Palace**, located 23 km south of Trongsa. This was the winter palace of the second king, Jigme Wangchuk, and is now used as a monastery.

After lunch at Trongsa, continue driving to Punakha. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Punakha

Day 8: Punakha to Thimphu via Khamsum Yuelley Chorten

Punakha to Thimphu | 1,200m | 3 hrs + hike | 77 km

After breakfast, hike to **Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten**. This 30-meter tall chorten (also known as the **Nyergang Lhakhang**) took eight years to build and was consecrated in 1999. The chorten is dedicated to the fifth king and serves to protect the country.

After lunch, drive to Thimphu. In the evening, visit **Tashichho Dzong** (Fortress of the Glorious Religion), built in 1641 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and reconstructed in 1961 by the Third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, known as the Father of Modern Bhutan. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Thimphu

Day 9: Tango Monastery Hike

Thimphu | 2,800m | 3-4 hrs hike | 92 km

After breakfast, embark on a hike to **Tango Monastery**. It takes around 45 minutes to drive from Thimphu city to the starting point. The hike climbs 280 meters and takes about 45 minutes.

Lama Gyalwa Lhanampa founded the site in the 12th century, and the Divine Madman, Lama Drukpa Kunley, built the present building in the 15th century. In 1616, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal visited Tango and meditated in a cave nearby for three years. The head lama, a descendant of Lama Drukpa Kunley, presented the monastery to the Zhabdrung, who carved a sandalwood statue of Chenresig and

installed it in the monastery.

After lunch, you may also visit **Cheri Monastery** on the opposite side, or explore handicraft shops in town if interested. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Thimphu

Day 10: Thimphu to Paro

Thimphu to Paro | 2,280m | 2 hrs | 65 km

After breakfast, visit the **National Library**, which houses a vast collection of ancient Buddhist manuscripts, followed by the **Folk Heritage Museum**.

Drive to Paro and visit **Ta Dzong**, an ancient watchtower built in 1656, renovated in 1968, and converted into the **National Museum of Bhutan**. Then visit **Rinpung Dzong (Paro Dzong)**, built in 1646 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The Dzong currently houses the administrative offices of Paro District and a monastery. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Paro

Day 11: Tiger's Nest Monastery Hike

Paro | 3,120m | 5-6 hrs hike | —

After breakfast, embark on an excursion to **Tiger's Nest Monastery (Taktsang)**. The total distance is **7.4 km (4.5 miles)** round trip and takes a **minimum of 5 hours**. The elevation at the starting point is **2,600m**, and the monastery sits at **3,100m** above sea level.

A 25-minute drive from the main town of Paro takes you to Satsam Chorten, where the trail begins. The path climbs through beautiful pine forests, with many trees festooned with Spanish moss and occasional groves of fluttering prayer flags. We stop for rest and refreshments at Taktsang Cafeteria, then continue until we see Tiger's Nest Monastery clearly within reach. The history dates back to the 8th century when Guru Rinpoche, a tantric master, flew to this place on the back of a flying tigress—said to be his Tibetan consort Yeshe Tsogyal—and meditated in a cave nearby. The temple was built in the 17th century by Penlop Gyaltse Tenzin Rabgye. This incredible monastery clings to the edge of a sheer cliff that plunges 600 meters into the valley below.

After lunch, visit **Kyichu Lhakhang**, one of Bhutan's oldest Buddhist temples, built in 659 AD by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. In the evening, stroll around the charming town of Paro for final shopping. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Paro

Day 12: Departure

Paro | 2,280m | — | —

Early morning, drive to Paro International Airport for your departure. Bid farewell to the Land of the Thunder Dragon. Tashi Delek!

Meals: B

What's Included

Included

+ Accommodation in 3* Hotels (1 Single room just for you).
+ All Three Meals (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner). Lunch will be served in a local Tourist Restaurant.
+ Daily Tariff.
+ Visa Fee.
+ Royalty and Government Taxes.
+ SDF (Sustainable Development Fee) of USD 100 per night per person, which directly goes towards free education, Free Healthcare and infrastructure development.
+ Transportation from receive till drop.
+ Museum and Monument fee.
+ Bottle Water in Car.
+ Sightseeing.
+ English Speaking Guide.
+ Driver.

Not Included

- Air Fare.
- Insurance Premiums.
- Payment for service provided on a personal basis.
- Cost for any services not mentioned in the "Inclusive Head"
- Cost incurred due to mishaps, strikes, political unrest, sudden death etc.
- Personal expenses in items such as laundry, soft or hard drinks, camera charges, bottle water in restaurants or in hotels, Portage, bellboy charges.
- Tips to guide and driver.

Ready to Book?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts to customize this itinerary.

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