

Sample Bhutan Itineraries: 5-Day to 14-Day Trip Plans

Planning

18 min read

Planning your Bhutan itinerary can feel overwhelming given so much to see and limited time. These carefully crafted sample itineraries cover different trip lengths and interests, from classic first-time visits to specialized festival, trekking, and family tours. Use these as templates to discuss with your tour operator and customize based on your specific interests.

Classic 5-Day: Highlights of Western Bhutan

The perfect introduction for first-time visitors with limited time. Covers the essential highlights of Paro, Thimphu, and Punakha - the three most iconic destinations in western Bhutan.

Pro Tips

- Day 1: Arrive Paro → Drive to Thimphu (1 hour). Evening explore Memorial Chorten, main street
- Day 2: Thimphu full day - Tashichho Dzong, Buddha Dordenma, Folk Heritage Museum, Weekend Market (if Sat/Sun)
- Day 3: Thimphu → Punakha via Dochula Pass (108 stupas). Visit Punakha Dzong, Chimi Lhakhang fertility temple
- Day 4: Punakha → Paro. Afternoon visit Paro Dzong, National Museum, Kyichu Lhakhang
- Day 5: Early Tiger's Nest hike (5-6 hours round trip). Evening farewell dinner. Or depart Paro
- Best for: First-timers, short vacation, essential Bhutan experience
- Estimated cost: \$1,500-2,000 per person (mid-range)
- Note: Can extend to 6 days for more relaxed pace

Classic 7-Day: Western Bhutan In-Depth

The most popular itinerary length, allowing deeper exploration of western Bhutan with more relaxed pacing and additional experiences like Haa Valley or longer time in each destination.

Pro Tips

- Day 1: Arrive Paro. Visit Paro Dzong, National Museum. Acclimatize
- Day 2: Paro → Haa Valley via Chelela Pass (highest motorable pass, 3,988m). Explore Haa
- Day 3: Haa → Thimphu. Afternoon city tour: Buddha Dordenma, Memorial Chorten
- Day 4: Thimphu full day: Tashichho Dzong, Folk Heritage Museum, arts school, market
- Day 5: Thimphu → Punakha via Dochula Pass. Punakha Dzong, suspension bridge walk
- Day 6: Punakha morning (Chimi Lhakhang) → Return to Paro via scenic route
- Day 7: Tiger's Nest hike (early start). Afternoon free or departure
- Best for: First-timers wanting comprehensive experience

- Estimated cost: \$2,200-2,800 per person (mid-range)
- Variations: Swap Haa for extra day in Punakha or add farmhouse stay

10-Day: Western & Central Bhutan

Extends beyond western Bhutan to include the spiritual heartland of Bumthang, crossing dramatic mountain passes and experiencing traditional villages and ancient temples.

Pro Tips

- Days 1-3: Paro, Thimphu (as in 7-day itinerary)
- Day 4: Thimphu → Punakha via Dochula. Punakha Dzong
- Day 5: Punakha → Trongsa (long scenic drive, 6-7 hrs). Visit Trongsa Dzong
- Day 6: Trongsa → Bumthang via Yotongla Pass. Visit Jakar town
- Day 7: Bumthang valley tour: Jambay Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang, Burning Lake
- Day 8: Bumthang - Tang Valley exploration or cheese/beer factory visit
- Day 9: Bumthang → Paro (long drive or domestic flight if available). Evening free
- Day 10: Tiger's Nest hike. Departure
- Best for: Those wanting to go beyond the classics
- Estimated cost: \$3,200-4,000 per person (mid-range)
- Note: Domestic flights (when available) reduce drive time significantly

14-Day: Grand Tour West to East

The comprehensive Bhutan experience, traveling from Paro to Trashigang in the far east. This journey showcases Bhutan's diversity from developed west to traditional east.

Pro Tips

- Days 1-3: Paro, Thimphu - major sights and acclimatization
- Days 4-5: Punakha and Wangdue - dzongs, temples, rafting option
- Days 6-7: Trongsa, Bumthang - central valleys and spiritual sites
- Day 8: Bumthang → Mongar via Thrumshingla Pass (beautiful drive)
- Day 9: Mongar → Trashigang. Visit Trashigang Dzong
- Day 10: Trashigang area - weaving villages, local markets
- Day 11: Return journey begins - Trashigang → Bumthang or Mongar
- Day 12: Continue west - Bumthang/Trongsa region
- Day 13: Return to Paro (flight if available, otherwise drive via Punakha)
- Day 14: Tiger's Nest or reserve day. Departure
- Best for: Serious Bhutan enthusiasts, repeat visitors
- Estimated cost: \$4,500-6,000 per person (mid-range)

- Note: Eastern roads can be rough - patience required

Festival Special: Paro Tshechu (7 Days)

Timed around the famous Paro Tshechu (typically March/April), this itinerary ensures you experience the colorful mask dances while still seeing major sights.

Pro Tips

- Day 1: Arrive Paro. Check festival schedule. Evening rest
- Day 2: Full day at Paro Tshechu - arrive early for best viewing position
- Day 3: Second day of Tshechu (often includes thongdrol unveiling at dawn)
- Day 4: Paro → Punakha via Thimphu. Punakha Dzong visit
- Day 5: Punakha → Thimphu. Afternoon Thimphu sightseeing
- Day 6: Thimphu morning tour → Return to Paro. Kyichu Lhakhang
- Day 7: Tiger's Nest hike. Departure
- Best for: Cultural immersion, photography enthusiasts
- Estimated cost: \$2,500-3,200 per person (mid-range)
- Important: Book 4-6 months ahead - festival times are peak season
- Variations: Thimphu Tshechu (September) or Punakha Drubchen (February/March)

Trekking: Druk Path + Culture (8 Days)

Combines the classic Druk Path Trek (5-6 days) from Paro to Thimphu with cultural sightseeing. Experience alpine lakes, rhododendron forests, and stunning mountain views.

Pro Tips

- Day 1: Arrive Paro. Paro Dzong, National Museum. Trek briefing
- Day 2: Trek Day 1: Paro to Jele Dzong (3,450m). Through forest to meadows
- Day 3: Trek Day 2: Jele Dzong to Jangchulakha (3,780m). Views of Chomolhari
- Day 4: Trek Day 3: Jangchulakha to Jimiling (3,880m). High ridgeline walking
- Day 5: Trek Day 4: Jimiling to Simkotra (4,110m). Pass mountain lakes
- Day 6: Trek Day 5: Simkotra to Phajoding to Thimphu. Descend to capital
- Day 7: Thimphu sightseeing - Buddha Dordenma, Tashichho Dzong, markets
- Day 8: Thimphu → Paro. Tiger's Nest hike or rest. Departure
- Best for: Active travelers, trekking enthusiasts
- Fitness: Moderate fitness required, some altitude experience helpful
- Best season: March-May, September-November
- Estimated cost: \$2,800-3,500 per person (camping trek)

Family-Friendly (7 Days)

Designed for families with children, this itinerary features shorter drives, kid-friendly activities, and flexibility for varying energy levels.

Pro Tips

- Day 1: Arrive Paro. Short walk around town. Early dinner and rest
- Day 2: Paro - Kyichu Temple, Paro Dzong, archery demonstration, riverside picnic
- Day 3: Paro → Thimphu. Takin Preserve (kids love takins!), Buddha Dordenma
- Day 4: Thimphu - Folk Heritage Museum (interactive), paper-making workshop, evening market
- Day 5: Thimphu → Punakha (shorter drive via Dochula). Suspension bridge walk
- Day 6: Punakha morning → Return to Paro. Farmhouse visit option
- Day 7: Tiger's Nest - kids 8+ can do the hike; younger ones to cafeteria. Departure
- Best for: Families with children 6+
- Estimated cost: \$2,000-2,600 per person (mid-range, child discounts apply)
- Tips: Request child-friendly meals, bring snacks, allow flexibility
- Kids under 6: SDF exempt; 6-11: 50% SDF discount

Photography Tour (10 Days)

Optimized for landscape and cultural photography, this itinerary prioritizes golden hour timing, iconic viewpoints, and festival/local life opportunities.

Pro Tips

- Day 1: Arrive Paro. Golden hour at Paro Valley viewpoint
- Day 2: Pre-dawn start for Tiger's Nest at sunrise (fewer crowds, best light)
- Day 3: Paro → Haa via Chelela Pass. Sunset shoot at pass (weather permitting)
- Day 4: Haa village life morning → Thimphu afternoon/evening shoots
- Day 5: Thimphu - pre-dawn Memorial Chorten (prayer rituals), Buddha at sunset
- Day 6: Dochula Pass sunrise → Punakha. Golden hour at Punakha Dzong
- Day 7: Punakha morning shoot → Phobjikha Valley. Crane photography (winter)
- Day 8: Phobjikha dawn shoot → Bumthang (if time permits)
- Day 9: Return to Paro via scenic route. Various photo stops
- Day 10: Buffer day for reshoot/weather makeup. Departure
- Best for: Serious photographers, social media creators
- Estimated cost: \$3,500-4,500 per person
- Tip: Hire photography-specialized guide. Bring multiple memory cards

Itinerary Customization Tips

Every itinerary can be tailored to your interests, pace, and budget. Here's how to work with your tour operator to create your perfect trip.

Pro Tips

- Share your interests: culture, nature, adventure, photography, wellness
- Be realistic about driving: Mountain roads are slow (30-40 km/hr average)
- Budget buffer days: Weather and road conditions can cause delays
- Festival timing: Check dates and book early if planning around festivals
- Trekking add-ons: Even day hikes can be added to cultural tours
- Special experiences: Hot stone bath, cooking class, archery, farm stay
- Luxury vs. budget: Specify accommodation preferences upfront
- Physical ability: Be honest about fitness levels for appropriate activities
- Combine countries: Popular to pair with Nepal or India
- Season matters: Spring/autumn best for most activities

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the minimum number of days for Bhutan?

5 days is the practical minimum covering Paro (Tiger's Nest), Thimphu, and Punakha. Less than 5 days means too much time traveling and not enough experiencing. For a relaxed trip, 7-9 days is ideal.

Can I customize sample itineraries?

Absolutely! These are templates. Your tour operator can modify based on interests, fitness level, festival dates, and special requests. Popular customizations include adding Haa Valley, extending in Bumthang, or adding treks.

Which itinerary is best for first-timers?

The Classic 7-Day Western Bhutan itinerary covers essential highlights: Paro (Tiger's Nest), Thimphu (capital), Punakha (beautiful dzong), and Phobjikha (cranes). It's well-paced and includes the must-see destinations.

How much driving is involved?

Bhutan's mountain roads limit daily distances. Expect 2-4 hours of scenic (but winding) driving between destinations. Longer journeys to Bumthang or eastern Bhutan take 6-8 hours with stops.

Can I combine trekking with sightseeing?

Yes! Popular combinations include 3-4 days of sightseeing plus the Druk Path Trek (6 days) or shorter treks like Bumthang Owl Trek (3 days). Allow 10-14 days for comprehensive sightseeing-trekking itineraries.

What if I want to see a festival?

Build your itinerary around festival dates. Major festivals (Paro, Thimphu Tshechus) attract crowds - book 4-6 months ahead. Your operator can suggest itineraries incorporating festivals with other highlights.

Need More Information?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts for personalized advice.

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