

9 Days Cultural Tour

Nine days is the threshold: the shortest trip that reaches Bumthang, the spiritual heartland where Guru Rinpoche left his body print in the rock at Kurjey and Bhutan's oldest temple has stood since the seventh century. The journey there is half the point - over Dochula to Punakha, across Pele La past Phobjikha's crane valley, through Trongsa's great fortress - a full west-to-centre transect of the kingdom. Two nights in Bumthang let you explore its four valleys and sacred sites without a watch in your hand. Choose this length if the Bhutan you're seeking is the old, holy one - and you're willing to earn it with some honest mountain driving. The Tiger's Nest hike still waits at the end, when you're strongest.

LOCATION	DURATION
Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Phobjikha, Trongsa, Bumthang	9

Highlights

- Ta Dzong - National Museum of Bhutan
- Rinpung Dzong (Paro Dzong)
- Tiger's Nest Monastery hike (2,600m to 3,100m)
- Kyichu Lhakhang - 7th century temple
- Buddha Dordenma - 51m tall statue
- National Library & Folk Heritage Museum
- Takin Preserve Center
- School of 13 Arts and Crafts
- Tashichho Dzong
- Dochula Pass - 108 chortens (3,140m)
- Chimi Lhakhang - Temple of Fertility
- Punakha Dzong - Palace of Great Happiness
- Phobjikha Valley - Black-necked Crane habitat
- Gangtey Gumpa
- 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)

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Paro - Valley Exploration

Paro | 2,280m | — | —

You will be received by a representative from Byways Tours and Travels at the airport and transferred to your hotel.

After lunch, 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: L/D | Hotel in Paro

Day 2: Paro to Thimphu - City Tour

Paro to Thimphu | 2,350m | 1.5 hrs | 55 km

After breakfast, drive from Paro to Thimphu (approximately 1.5 hours), stopping en route at **Tamchog Lhakhang**, the 15th-century temple of the famed iron-bridge builder Thangtong Gyalpo. On arrival, visit **Buddha Dordenma**, the tallest Buddha statue in the world at 51 meters. Then visit the **National Library**, which houses a vast collection of ancient Buddhist manuscripts, followed by the **Folk Heritage Museum**.

Continue to the **Takin Preserve Center** to see Bhutan's national animal, the Takin. Visit **Zhulikha 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. Lunch will be served at a tourist restaurant in the city center.

After lunch, visit the **authentic Bhutanese Craft Market** and the **Weekend Market**. You may also visit an **archery ground** to watch archery matches if interested. 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. Enjoy an evening stroll around Thimphu City. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Thimphu

Day 3: 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 construction was foretold by Guru Rinpoche, who predicted that a person named Namgyal would arrive at a hill resembling a sleeping elephant. The Zhabdrung ordered his architect, Zowe Palep, to sleep before a Buddha statue; in his dreams, the Zhabdrung took him to Zangtopelri (Paradise) and showed him Guru Rinpoche's palace. From this vision, the architect conceived the design, never committing it to paper. The Dzong was named **Druk Pungthang Dechen Phodrang**, meaning Palace of Great Happiness. Punakha remains the winter residence of the **Chief Abbot (Je Khenpo)**, and King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk convened the first National Assembly here in 1952. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Punakha

Day 4: Punakha to Phobjikha to Trongsa

Punakha to Phobjikha to Trongsa | 2,180m | 7 hrs | 206 km

After breakfast, drive to Trongsa via Phobjikha Valley. 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. 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.

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

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Trongsa

Day 5: Trongsa to Bumthang Valley

Trongsa to Bumthang | 2,580m | 2.5 hrs | 68 km

After breakfast, visit **Trongsa Dzong**, built in 1643 by Chogyel Minjur Tempa, an official sent by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to unify eastern Bhutan. It was enlarged at the end of the 17th century by Desi Tenzin Rabgye. The official name is **Chhoeckhor 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.

Then visit **Ta Dzong (Trongsa Museum)**, an ancient watchtower converted into a museum. After lunch, drive to Bumthang Valley. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Bumthang

Day 6: 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, who was born in Tang Valley of Bumthang. 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 7: Bumthang to Thimphu

Bumthang to Thimphu | 2,320m | 8 hrs | 270 km

Today is a long drive of approximately 8-9 hours. Have an early breakfast and depart for Thimphu. Lunch will be served en route. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Thimphu

Day 8: Thimphu to Paro & Tiger's Nest Hike

Thimphu to Paro | 3,120m | 5-6 hrs hike | 55 km + hike

After an early breakfast, drive from Thimphu back to Paro (approximately 1.5 hours). Then 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 Gyaltsen 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, celebrate the journey with a farewell dinner in Paro. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B/L/D | Hotel in Paro

Day 9: Departure

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

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 in twin sharing basis
- + All Three Meals (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)
- + Daily Tariff
- + Visa Fee
- + Royalty and Government Taxes
- + Sustainable Development Fee of USD 100 per night per person which 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, etc.
- Personal expenses in items such as laundry, soft or hard drinks, camera charges, bottle water in restaurants or in hotels, Portage, bellboy charges
- Charges for chartered flights necessitated by a sudden death or unforeseen mishap
- Tips to guide and driver

Ready to Book?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts to customize this itinerary.

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