

# Gentle Walking Bhutan

## (With Trongsa Tsechu)



*Gentle walks, cultural highlights and comfortable accommodation - the best way to explore this remarkable Himalayan Kingdom*

## Bhutan - Walking Holiday



### ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

|                     |                                       |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Accommodation:      | Hotels/guesthouses                    |
| Grade:              | Gentle ●●●●●●●●                       |
| Max altitude:       | 3,700m/ 12,139ft -<br>Shutre Sae Pass |
| Duration:           | 16 Days, London to<br>London          |
| Walks on:           | 9 days                                |
| Min/Max group size: | 2/12<br>Guaranteed to run for 2       |
| Trip Leader:        | Local leader                          |
| Land only:          | Joining in Kathmandu                  |

### Private departures:

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday for a minimum of two people sharing from £2,950 per person, land only. International flights available from £750.

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| <b>2014 dates and prices:</b>                     | <b>Land Only</b> |
| Tue 23 Dec - Wed 07 Jan 15                        | £2,450           |
| <i>This departure includes the Trongsa Tsechu</i> |                  |

**Flight inclusive from: £3,300**  
For latest prices see [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com) or call the office on +44 (0)1453 844400

The following departures have slightly different itineraries. These can be downloaded at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com) or call the office on +44 (0)1453 844400

|                               |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>2014 dates and prices:</b> | <b>Land Only</b> |
| Sat 08 Mar - Sun 23 Mar       | £2,750           |
| Thu 10 Apr - Sat 26 Apr       | £2,875           |
| Wed 01 Oct - Thu 16 Oct       | £2,750           |
| Sat 01 Nov - Sun 16 Nov       | £2,750           |
| Wed 05 Nov - Thu 20 Nov       | £2,750           |

Prices include all internal flights, necessary trekking permits and park fees

***Enjoy one of Bhutans most  
impressive Festivals at Trongsa  
Tsechu***



Accredited  
Agent



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# Introduction



- Excellent and varied programme of gentle walks taking you through delightful scenery to visit villages, temples, old palaces and hermit retreats.
- Attend Trongsa Tsechu Festival
- First rate accommodation in Bhutan using comfortable hotels and lodges
- Dwarika's hotel in Kathmandu - a unique heritage property with unsurpassed service and style
- Ample time to explore the many cultural highlights of Bhutan including iconic Taksang Temple

The tiny Kingdom of Bhutan in the eastern Himalaya, or the 'Thunder Dragon Kingdom', has successfully remained isolated from the outside world for very many centuries. Only at the time of the 4th King's Coronation (1974) was the first trickle of foreigners allowed in. Prior to the building of the road from India to Thimphu even visiting Indian presidents took 6 days on horseback to visit the King. It still remains a secretive Kingdom and the present 5<sup>th</sup> King is keen to preserve its unique customs and traditions.

Its history is a capsule of all that is mystical about the Himalaya; re-incarnate rulers, who used black magic to defeat Tibetan aggressors, lama-saints, who foretold the future and who fought demons opposed to the spread of Buddhism, and civil wars between powerful district governors, or penlops, who laid plot and counter-plot in an endless cycle of strife and assassinations.

This holiday offers the perfect introduction to Bhutan, for those who like to explore on foot! We have designed the itinerary to give you a wide variety of experiences though it will be an adventure enjoyed in comparative comfort because every night is spent either in a hotel, or comfortable lodge. Each walk has an interesting objective taking you to fascinating temples, hermit retreats, old palaces, ancient villages or simply into lovely scenery. This is a holiday that will be enjoyed to the full by those who enjoy weekend walks in the British countryside. As well as the main walk, on certain days a gentler or harder walk may also be possible. On certain days it is also possible to opt out of the walk, enabling you to relax in or around your hotel or lodge. There are also exciting road journeys following twisting mountain roads and crossing high passes in your comfortable mini-coach. By its nature this is an adventure with plenty of varied walking in a place that is only just emerging into the 21st Century.

## Our Guides

Mountain Kingdoms have been working with the same partner in Bhutan since 1986. Their guides are some of the best in the Kingdom. They speak fluent English, as this is taught in all Bhutanese schools, and are fully qualified guides. The Tourism Authority of Bhutan insists that a Bhutanese trek or tour leader must pass his/her guiding exams in Thimphu before accompanying groups of foreign visitors. Guides receive regular 'top-up' training and in September 2011, 15 of our regular leaders completed an extended training course run by Mountain Kingdoms in Bhutan.



Some of our Bhutanese Guides



## Outline itinerary

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Days 1-2   | Fly to Kathmandu, at leisure in Kathmandu.   |
| Days 3-4   | Fly to Bhutan and drive to Thimphu with sightseeing and Cheri Gomba visit.<br><b>Christmas Day.</b>    |
| Days 5     | Drive to Punakha with valley walk and dzong visit.   |
| Days 6, 7  | Drive to Kipche. Walk to Gangtey and spend time in the valley. Drive to Trongsa.                       |
| Days 8, 9  | Drive to Bumthang with Lamey Gomba walk. Visit Swan Lakhang and valley walk.<br><b>New Year's Eve.</b> |
| Day 10     | Drive to Trongsa. Attend Trongsa Tsechu Festival.<br><b>New Years Day.</b>                             |
| Day 11     | Drive from Trongsa to Punakha with visit to Chimi Lakhang on way.                                      |
| Day 12-13  | Drive to Dochu La. Walk to Trashigang then drive to Paro. Sightseeing and Taktsang Monastery.          |
| Days 14-16 | Fly to Kathmandu; at leisure in Kathmandu. Fly to London.  |

## Information on Festival departures

Festivals are a part of Bhutanese life. Colourful affairs, they involve masked dances and singing to celebrate nature or ward off evil spirits and it's a privilege to be able to attend one. Wherever possible, we've organised our departures to coincide with a festival which means that no two itineraries are exactly the same. We've outlined the changes for each festival departure below.

*Please be aware that this trip involves travel above 9,840ft/3,000m. Whilst all our itineraries are carefully designed to optimise acclimatisation to high altitudes, participants on this trip may experience some symptoms of being at altitude. The Dossier pack we provide when you book your holiday includes comprehensive advice on safe travel at altitude. If you require further information or advice on travel at altitude prior to booking please contact the office to speak to an experienced member of our team. Alternatively we recommend [www.medex.org.uk](http://www.medex.org.uk) as a good source of information.*

**Please also note:** we have been running this trek for very many years now, and have had hundreds of happy clients who return in love with Bhutan. The itinerary is never the same each time! Whilst every effort is made to keep to the above itinerary, this is Adventure Travel in a remote mountain region. It is likely that there will be changes in the itinerary in terms of anything from the exact hotel used to the villages we may stop in for the night. Weather conditions, road conditions, vehicle breakdowns can all contribute to changes. Your Bhutanese leader will do everything to ensure that you are inconvenienced as little as possible in such circumstances but an easy-going nature is a positive asset! Our experience is that your leader will also often suggest things that are not described by us and will vary the walks depending upon the weather, the group's inclination, people's fitness, time available and their own preferred versions of the walks. Therefore, we ask you not to expect an itinerary cast in stone and that you engage with your guide to make the most of his/her knowledge.

The Government of Bhutan has a strict policy to preserve its cultural and traditional values and antiques may not be taken out of the country. The government also requests that clients do not give sweets, pens, etc., to children or distribute medicine to villagers.



# Mountain Kingdoms Responsible Tourism Policy

## Award winners

Mountain Kingdoms has a top five star rating for sustainable tourism from the Association of Independent Tour Operators' (AITO) and is a previous winner of the prestigious annual AITO Responsible Tourism Award.



## Our commitment

Mountain Kingdoms is committed to responsible tourism, through policies and practices which permeate all aspects of its business. Our policies aim to ensure that we and our clients act in a way which is socially, environmentally and culturally sound. We feel strongly that all Mountain Kingdoms holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment by minimising pollution, and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. We tread lightly - low volume, low impact trekking/touring is the best way of preserving the beautiful and fragile places we visit.

We work with organisations such as Tourism Concern, International Porter Protection Group (IPPG), Beyond Carbon, AITO and various charities, to help achieve our responsible tourism goals.

## Our Initiatives

We support a number of Responsible Tourism initiatives and organisations in many of the destinations we visit. Our main initiative is funding English lessons for our sherpas and local guides in Nepal where we contribute approx \$1500 per year. We are also very active in raising funds for the Shiva Charity's Ginette Harrison School in Nepal and to date we have raised over £15,300 for Shiva Charity's schools. Other examples of our recent ongoing work are the Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service, the Bridge Project in Zanskar and support for the Village Education Project in Kilimanjaro. Further details of all our Responsible Tourism initiatives can be found at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).

## Porter Protection

In the countries where we use porters such as Nepal and Peru, we feel that the issue of porter protection is immensely important. We support the work and the aims of the IPPG (International Porter Protection Group) and as such we have a set of guidelines to adhere to and which we apply worldwide.



## Carbon off-setting

Working with Beyond Carbon we offset the carbon emissions for every Mountain Kingdoms holiday booked by clients that includes a flight. Beyond Carbon allocate this money to a school in Ladakh, India which Mountain Kingdoms has supported for many years. Clients who book a Land Only trip with us may like to make their own contribution via the Beyond Carbon website: <http://beyond-carbon.com>.

## Further information:

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested equipment and clothing list and lots of other useful information. If you have any queries at this initial stage, feel free to give us a call on +44 (0)1453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.





# Day-by-day itinerary



## DAY 1: TUESDAY *DEPART LONDON*

Depart the UK to fly overnight to Kathmandu.

## DAY 2: WEDNESDAY *ARRIVE KATHMANDU*

You will be met and transferred to the luxurious and stylish, Dwarika's Hotel with a cool elegant courtyard filled with Nepalese wooden carvings and statues and a superb restaurant where you can eat in traditional style. After the long flight from London there's no better place to relax.

Overnight: Dwarika's Hotel

## DAY 3: THURSDAY *CHRISTMAS DAY. FLY TO PARO (2,280m/7,600ft). DRIVE TO THIMPHU (2,320m/7,733ft)*



Transfer to the airport for the short flight up to Bhutan. On a clear day the panoramic views of the Himalaya are sensational, including Everest and Kangchenjunga, but particularly exciting is the approach through the Bhutanese foothills and the landing, including a few steep turns to land at the tiny airstrip of Paro. Although you are at the mercy of the airline computer, if possible try to sit on the left hand side of the plane for the most spectacular views.

In Paro you will be met by your Bhutanese guide and will drive to Thimphu (1½-2 hours). There should be time for some sightseeing in Thimphu depending on flight schedule.

Thimphu has an attractive valley location and is relatively small for a capital city but has grown greatly in recent years. There are many places of interest to visit there. Initially you might like to drive up to see the giant Buddha figure and enjoy the views over the town.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelhri Hotel

(Meals: B, L, D)

## DAY 4: FRIDAY *IN AND AROUND THIMPHU - SIGHTSEEING AND VISIT CHERI GOMPA*

In the morning you visit Cheri Gumpa. It is a 7½ mile/12km drive from Thimphu, via the villages of Dechencholing (site of the Queen Mother's Palace) and Begana, to where the metalled road ends. Alighting from your vehicle you cross the Wang Chu River on a small cantilevered footbridge and follow a footpath steeply uphill for 45 minutes to 1 hour, to reach the gumpa (monastery). This gumpa was built in 1620 by the Shabdrung (first ruler of Bhutan) who established its first order of monks here. It is usually possible to enter Cheri courtyard, but occasionally not the temples. Watch out here for the very tame deer which live in these woods. On the way back from Cheri your guide may suggest a walk through some of the nearby villages, through a landscape of paddy fields, dotted with farmsteads and small hamlets, where you may see people tending their livestock, working in the fields and perhaps drying grain on rush mats in the sun.

You will return to Thimphu where there will be time to enjoy some sightseeing in Thimphu. There are many places of interest to visit in Thimphu, including the Tashishoddzong (the main government buildings), the Textile Museum, the Heritage Museum, the late King's Memorial Chorten, the National Library, the School of Painting and the silversmiths and pottery workshops. The Government Handicrafts Emporium is possibly the best place to look for local handicrafts especially if you are looking to buy national dress. The handmade paper workshop is a very interesting visit to see the paper being made. Some nice items made from handmade paper are also for sale there. You could also visit the Post Office to buy some of Bhutan's very attractive stamps. They also have good t-shirts on sale there.

While in Thimphu you might also like to visit the 'zoo'. This is in fact a very large enclosure (several acres) just above the town, containing only Takin, the very rare animal found exclusively in Bhutan and parts of China and possibly one of the most quirky and strangest looking animals you will ever see.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelhri Hotel

(Meals: B, L, D)

## DAY 5: SATURDAY *DRIVE OVER DOCHU LA TO PUNAKHA. VALLEY WALK AND VISIT DZONG*

After breakfast you will drive east to Punakha. Leaving Thimphu you climb to cross the Dochu la Pass, 3,048m/10,000ft), a spot marked by 108 chortens. Here, weather permitting you may take in a magnificent mountain vista. On clear days there are fabulous views of the Eastern Himalaya from here but this is a beautiful spot even on misty days. You then drive down through varied forest into the lush Punakha Valley. You will then do a lovely walk in the lush almost sub-tropical Punakha Valley. You drive further up the valley and start your walk at a pedestrian suspension bridge that crosses the Mo Chu River and follow up through paddy fields to the base of the hill where Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten is sited. The climb to the top is then quite steep but



takes only 45 minutes or so. This chorten was consecrated in December 1999 and contains sacred relics donated from Punakha Dzong. Leaving the grounds of the chorten via a different gate you descend to join a contouring path which ultimately leads you to the small village of Yabesa and you then follow the Mo Chu downstream past Sonagasha, the King's Palace and on to Punakha Dzong.

The fabulous Punakha Dzong, one of the most spectacular and important in the kingdom, is situated at the confluence of two rivers. In 1994 there was a major flood in the town which caused a lot of damage to the dzong but it has now been beautifully renovated and is a real showcase for Bhutanese craftsmanship and painting. You are normally allowed into the dzong unless there are VIPs visiting. After your visit you may either drive back to your hotel or extend your walk southwards down the valley for a further hour or so to reach the large settlement of Khuruthang and continue on to your hotel or meet up with your transport.

Overnight: Damchen Resort, or similar

(Meals: B, L, D)

**DAY 6: SUNDAY      *DRIVE TO CROSS PELE LA PASS (3300m/10825ft) AND CONTINUE TO LONGTEY (2.5 - 3 hours driving); WALK TO GANGTEY (3-4 hours)***

After breakfast at the hotel you will drive down the Punakha Valley and up through the town of Wangdi Phodrang. Unfortunately, the massive dzong here burnt down in 2012 - a great cultural loss. You then drive up the beautiful wooded valley of the Dang Chu to cross the Pele La Pass at 3,300m/10,825ft. From here there are good views. Descending from the pass you continue down to reach the village of Longtey.

You alight from your vehicle at the village of Longtey, below the Pele La and your lovely walk to Gangtey starts from here. You drop down from the road on a trail to reach a large meadow where yaks graze in the winter months and then climb the short way to the pretty village of Kipche. Bypassing the village you climb in beautiful oak/rhododendron forest to the Giche Pass at 3,560m/11,680ft. From the pass you will have beautiful views right down to Gangtey Gumpa and the wide Phobjikha Valley below. Your descent from the pass is steep at first, but then gentle as you descend, through the village of Kumbu, all the way to join the road near Gangtey gumpa where your transport will be waiting and you drive to your accommodation.

Gangtey (or Phobjikha as this area is sometimes called) is a beautiful wide, unspoilt glacial valley and is particularly famous as a major wintering ground for black necked cranes, which arrive here late October and stay till early spring before heading back to their breeding grounds in Siberia. These birds are particularly respected in local culture and feature in local tradition as "heavenly birds".

For those who prefer not to join today's walk it will be possible to remain with the vehicle and drive straight to your overnight accommodation.

Overnight: Dewachen Hotel, or local guesthouse.

(Meals: B, L, D)

**DAY 7: MONDAY      *HALF DAY GANGTEY VALLEY WALK AND DRIVE TO TRONGSA. VISIT TA DZONG MUSEUM***

Today you may see the Black Necked Cranes which should be in residence for your visit. It can be worthwhile arranging to go to see them before breakfast as they awake and before they fly off to their feeding grounds for the day. Speak to your guide about this.

This morning you will have the chance for a pleasant walk in the valley. In addition to glorious scenery, the valley boasts some wonderful legends surrounding events and geography, including tales about two different types of Yeti, a large one and a small variety and many other interesting legends. A number of different walks are possible here and your guide will suggest a suitable one.

Firstly it is a short 10-minute drive to reach the Black Necked Crane Information Centre. The cranes are usually only resident here between October and mid-February so there's every chance that you'll be able to enjoy good sightings, both from the centre and whilst out walking. The centre has interesting displays on the ecology of the valley, a small library on Bhutanese wildlife and birds and some telescopes for observing birdlife. Driving on it's another 10-15 minutes to reach the small hilltop settlement of Gangtey and its impressive gumpa, built in the 17th Century. From the gumpa you can follow a network of foot trails and farm tracks down from the hill top and down the valley visiting various villages and points of interest.

Later, you drive out of the valley and over the Pele La again to continue on to reach the town of Trongsa. You will see Trongsa's splendid Dzong long before you reach it because the road takes you up a long side valley before eventually turning back to Trongsa town. Trongsa has an exceptionally dramatic dzong, the ancestral home of the royal family. Because of its important strategic location this was one of the most important dzongs



in the country. Set above the dzong is the Ta Dzong, the watchtower, a lovely old building which has been recently really beautifully renovated and houses an excellent museum with several floors of royal memorabilia and sacred artefacts. The views from the roof are worth the climb.

Overnight: Yangkhil Resort, or similar.

(Meals: B, L, D)

#### **DAY 8: TUESDAY**

#### ***DRIVE TO CHUMEY AND THARPALING AND WALK TO LAMEY GOMPA IN THE BUMTHANG VALLEY (2,580m/8,600ft)***

From Trongsa you drive across the Yotong La and towards Bumthang. The Bhumthang region encompasses four major valleys and Jakar town where you will stay is in the main valley called Chokhor. The other valleys are the Ura Valley which is to the east, Tang valley which is slightly more off the beaten track and the Chhumei Valley which you arrive at first today before you arrive at Jakar township where you will spend the next Two nights. In Chumei your first port of call is the Nyimalung Monastery. Founded in 1938, the monastery is home to over 100 musically talented monks. From here you can walk down in 10 minutes to visit Prakhar Monastery a quaint village temple. Then rejoining your vehicle you will visit Zugney, a famous centre for weaving, where you will see the industry that is an integral part of Bhutanese society. It's said that every Bhutanese home is equipped with a loom for weaving and young girls are proficient in the craft before they reach the age of twenty.

You then drive up to the cluster of temples at Tharpaling - a sacred spot and place of meditation, founded by Geluwa Lonchen Rabchampa (1308-1363) during his self-exile from Tibet for ten years. Several picturesque monasteries dot the hillside above the Chumei Valley with views over Domkhar (Chumei) and Domkhar Summer Palace. After a picnic lunch, you start the 2-3 hour walk along an old trail back towards Jakhar. The path starts out beneath craggy cliffs, from where it climbs fairly gently up to the ridge top and the Shutre Sae Pass at 3,700m/12,139ft. Sited on the pass in a glass case is a statue of the founder of Tharpaling. From here the views are phenomenal - looking south you can see over the Chumei/Domkhar Valley with the Black Mountains in the distance. The other way you get fabulous and unexpected views over Jakhar town with the new airport runway and the dzong clearly seen far below. Beyond and further north, you can see towards the high mountains - perhaps even Mount Gangkar Punsum on a clear day. The walk down makes an exciting alternative way to arrive in Jakar.

You descend from the pass in beautiful forest - all downhill, sometimes a bit steep, but none of it difficult. On the higher reaches, you pass through pine, fir and rhododendron forest, the ground being laden with a covering of blue primula in the spring. Lower down, you reach coverage of bamboo and some truly enormous trees. Finally, you will arrive at Lamey Gompa, above Jakhar Dzong, where you will meet your transport and head to your hotel.

Overnight: Hotel Ugyenling

(Meals: B, L, D)

#### **DAY 9: WEDNESDAY**

#### ***NEW YEARS EVE. BUMTHANG VALLEY WALK, 2-3 HOURS, TEMPLE VISITS***

Today you make the scenic walk to Swan Lakhang (Ngang Lakhang), an ancient temple situated toward the head of the Chokhor valley. You drive a short distance to a long mani wall at the village of Tangbi, near the small temple of Thangbi Goemba, and start your walk from here, descending to a suspension bridge to cross to the other side of the river. The trail then ascends gently up the valley through pretty meadows and woodland of blue pine and bamboo. After a while Swan Lakhang appears ahead of you over to your left, while directly ahead is a conical hill topped by the ancient ruins of Chokhor Deb, site of an early Bhutanese victory against the Tibetans. You continue up to visit picturesque 15th Century Swan Lakhang temple named, legend has it, after swans seen on a small lake nearby by the founder of the temple.

From Swan Lakhang you descend a short way down to the road to meet your transport and drive back on a rather rough road in about an hour to Jakar town.

Later you will be able to explore around Jakar town with a short, almost entirely level walk taking in some of the principle sights of the valley. From the hotel you can walk to Jambay Lakhang. This is one of the country's oldest temples, built in the mid-7th Century. One interesting feature to look for is the set of three steps in the main temple. The first step, now hidden below floor level, is said to represent the time of the past or 'historical' Buddha. The second, very well worn, step represents the present Buddha, whilst the third step above, is said to represent the age of the future Buddha. The point at which the second step is worn down to ground level is held to be the time when the world as we currently know it will end.

From Jambay you take a farm track along the valley floor and walk for 30 minutes to reach Kurjey Lakhang, a series of three large temples. The oldest of the temples here houses a rock indented with the body shape of Guru Rinpoche, whilst the most recent dates back just 25 years and was built by the Queen Mother - Ashi Kesang



Wangchuck. Descending from the temples you cross a suspension bridge and walk downstream for 45 minutes to Tamshing Lakhang, the most important Nyingma gumpa in the Kingdom, established in 1501 by Pemalingpa. Inside you can see a suit of chain-mail armour, which Buddhists believe will bring good fortune if worn and then walked around the inner temple three times. Your transport will meet you outside the gumpa and return you to your hotel, with perhaps a brief stop in Jakhar town-ship on the way.

Later you might visit the picturesque Jakar Dzong, the ‘Castle of the White Bird’, so called because a white bird was supposed to have indicated the most auspicious place to build.

Overnight: Hotel Ugyenling

(Meals: B, L, D)

#### **DAY 10: THURSDAY                      NEW YEARS DAY. VISIT TRONGSA TSECHU FESTIVAL**

Today you will have an early breakfast and leave early to drive to Trongsa.

Reaching Trongsa you will head for the Dzong where you will attend the Trongsa Tsechu which is held in the courtyards of the Dzong. People from the countryside all around will gather, dressed in all their finery, to celebrate and socialise. Mask dancers will whirl in the courtyards of the dzong and dancers and audience alike will be kept under control by the tricks and antics of the clowns. These festivals are great fun but also attending a tsechu is thought to bring religious merit.

Overnight: Yangkhil Resort

(Meals: B, L, D)

#### **DAY 11: FRIDAY                      DRIVE TRONGSA TO PUNAKHA (5-6 HOURS) WITH WALK TO DRUKPA KUNLEY’S TEMPLE. VISIT CHIMI LAMKHANG**

Leaving Trongsa you drive up past the settlement of Chendebji to cross the Pele La Pass and make the long descent down the valley to Wangdi Phodrang.

Before driving on to your hotel in Punakha you may visit Chimi Lakhang a temple built by Drukpa Kunley. Known as the ‘The Divine Madman’, Drukpa Kunley was a 15th Century Bhutanese Lama and is Bhutan’s most popular Saint and one of the most important figures in Bhutanese folklore. Despite the apparent conservatism of the Bhutanese people, Drukpa Kunley with his unconventional views on sex is a great favourite throughout the country - the phallus symbols painted on the outside walls of houses date back to his teachings. Chimi Lakhang is especially popular with women who come here to pray for children. The temple is characterised by its many phallic symbols. This charming lakhang is reached by a short walk across the paddy fields and this short excursion takes about 45 minutes each way.

Overnight: Damchen Resort, or similar.

(Meals: B, L, D)

#### **DAY 12: SATURDAY                      DRIVE TO DOCHU LA; WALK TO TRASHIGANG-HONGTSHO - 4 hours walking CONTINUE TO PARO (2,280m/7,600ft).**

Today you drive to Paro, stopping en route at the Dochu la Pass, 3,048m/10,000ft) a spot marked by 108 chortens. Here, weather permitting you may take in a magnificent mountain vista. On clear days there are fabulous views of the Eastern Himalaya from here but this is a beautiful spot even on misty days.

From the pass you will take a lovely walk and will rejoin your transport further down along the road towards Thimphu. This walk follows a pleasant trail which takes you up the ridge in rhododendron forest to Lungchezekha Gumpa from where there are further fantastic mountain views. Your trail then descends in beautiful mixed forest passing Tashigang Gumpa to emerge at the road at Hongtsho where you will meet your transport and continue to Paro.

Overnight: Olathang Hotel

(Meals: B, L, D)

#### **DAY 13: SUNDAY                      A DAY IN THE PARO VALLEY. WALK TO TAKTSANG (3,110m/10,200ft) 4-5 hours AND FURTHER SIGHTSEEING**

Today you will walk up to the famous Tiger’s Nest, Taktsang Monastery - a fitting climax to your trip. The monastery is perched some 600m/2,000ft up on a cliff overlooking the valley and was said to be where the legendary Indian saint, Guru Padma Sambhava, flew from Tibet on the back of a tiger to defeat five demons who were opposing the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan. It is a steep uphill walk through woods of about 1½-2hrs, to reach a tea house (an ascent of 340m/1,125ft). Apart from offering welcome refreshment this tea house is one of the principle viewpoints of the monastery, and those who prefer not to climb any further can relax here whilst others continue on. If there is a particular religious gathering or VIP visit in progress, you will not be able to enter the Monastery but the further half an hour’s ascent is well worth it, as it brings you to another viewpoint directly across from the monastery. If you are able to make a visit, the final section of the walk takes







you from here steeply down 100m/330ft into the gorge that separates you from the monastery and then climbs back up again to reach the monastery gate. You descend back to the valley floor by your outward route back to where your vehicle will be waiting. The full walk to the monastery and back involves approximately 740m/2,440ft of ascent.

You then drive back into Paro. There should then be time for further sightseeing. You may also visit the ancient temple of Kyichu Lhakhang which was one of 108 temples built by Songtsen Gampo an important early Tibetan king, to pin down the Bon demon who was thought to hover over the whole of Tibet. You might also drive up the valley to see the ruins of Drukyl Dzong and perhaps catch a glimpse of the summit of Mount Chomolhari. Returning to Paro town you may see some of the treasures from Bhutan's National Museum. The Museum itself is closed, apparently until 2015, following the earthquake in 2011, but many of the artefacts and displays are now temporarily housed in a nearby building. The nearby spectacular Paro dzong is also worth a visit.

Overnight: Olathang Hotel

(Meals: B, L, D)

#### **DAY 14: MONDAY FLY TO KATHMANDU**

Again, a sensational take-off and scenic Himalayan flight past Chomolhari, Bhutan's second highest peak, past Kangchenjunga and Everest back to Kathmandu, where you transfer to the Dwarika's Hotel.

Overnight: Dwarikas Hotel

(Meals: B)

#### **DAY 15: TUESDAY AT LEISURE IN KATHMANDU**

A day to relax, shop, or sight-see in Kathmandu, one of the most fascinating and diverse cities in the world. Perhaps take a taxi to Thamel for a leisurely walk through the bustling and colourful streets into Durbar Square to glimpse the ancient shrines and royal palace.

Or you might visit Bhaktapur, one of the main cities of the valley. It is a more laid back place than Kathmandu and has a slightly more rustic feel. Its Durbar Square houses some wonderful palace and temple architecture and you may take an atmospheric ramble through its medieval back streets. After exploring there you could drive to Patan for lunch in the restaurant attached to the Patan museum. The Patan museum is well worth a visit as is Patan's Durbar Square and various nearby palaces and temples.

The important Hindu temple complex of Pashupatinath on the banks of the Bagmati River is only a 15 minute walk from the hotel (ask at the hotel desk for directions). It is a real experience to go there first thing in the morning when local people visit the temple with offerings for the god Shiva. Nearby, Boudhnath with its ancient Buddhist stupa and crowds of circumambulating pilgrims is just a 15 minute taxi ride away and is well worth a visit. It is nice to visit there just before sunset, and watch the sun set over the stupa while sipping a cold beer on the rooftop terrace of a café. A fitting way to bid goodbye to Nepal!

Overnight: Dwarika's Hotel

(Meals: B)

#### **DAY 16: WEDNESDAY DEPART KATHMANDU.**

This morning you will transfer to the airport for your international flight home. Arrive London early evening.

(Meals: B)

#### **Important Note**

*Every effort will be made to keep to the above itinerary but as this is Adventure Travel, we cannot guarantee it! By its very nature adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in remote and/or mountainous regions. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, difficulties with transportation and the health of group members can all contribute to the need to make changes, often at the very last minute. Changes can affect any part of the itinerary including overnight stops, duration of walking days, choice of accommodation and routing. Your trip leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.*

# General information



## Temperature range

|               | °C  | Jan  | Feb  | Mar  | Apr  | May  | Jun  | Jul  | Aug  | Sep  | Oct  | Nov  | Dec  |
|---------------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>NEPAL</b>  |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Kathmandu     | Max | 18   | 21   | 24   | 28   | 30   | 29   | 28   | 28   | 28   | 27   | 23   | 20   |
|               | Min | 1    | 3    | 7    | 11   | 15   | 19   | 20   | 19   | 18   | 12   | 7    | 2    |
| <b>BHUTAN</b> |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Paro          | Max | 5.4  | 10.4 | 14.5 | 17.6 | 23.5 | 25.4 | 26.8 | 25.3 | 22.4 | 18.7 | 13.9 | 11.2 |
|               | Min | -5.8 | 1.5  | 0.6  | 4.6  | 10.6 | 14.1 | 14.9 | 14.7 | 11.7 | 7.4  | 1.4  | -1.7 |
| Punakha       | Max | 16.1 | 19.6 | 21.2 | 34.4 | 27.2 | 31.2 | 32.0 | 31.4 | 29.9 | 27.8 | 22.3 | 15.0 |
|               | Min | 4.2  | 5.3  | 9.2  | 11.9 | 14.8 | 19.5 | 21.6 | 19.8 | 20.4 | 18.9 | 13.0 | 7.9  |
| Thimphu       | Max | 3.6  | 7.4  | 14.8 | 16.8 | 18.3 | 20.6 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 20.1 | 18.2 | 17.9 | 14.5 |
|               | Min | -2.6 | -1   | 5.3  | 7.1  | 8.4  | 14.5 | 13.4 | 10.8 | 8.9  | 6.2  | 5.0  | -1.1 |

## Extension ideas



While in Nepal there are various interesting and exciting options to pursue either before or after your trek.

**EVEREST MOUNTAIN FLIGHT.** After trekking in the region why not take the opportunity for a close-up view of the world's highest and most famous mountain from the air! The flight lasts about an hour and takes you from the Kathmandu valley, over the Khumbu region and culminates with the unforgettable view of Everest herself.



### **RAFTING, CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK AND BARDIA NATIONAL PARK.**

We offer options of rafting, and /or safari at the Bardia or the Royal Chitwan National Park. Please contact the office on: 01453 844400, for a detailed information sheet on either of these options.

**Please note:** If you want to extend your stay in Nepal it is essential we are informed as soon as possible after your booking. This is due to the high demand for flights to and from Kathmandu.



## Trip notes

**Hotels:** **Kathmandu:** We use the top class **Dwarika's Hotel**, which is filled with fascinating original carvings and artefacts. Its elegant Krishnarpan restaurant is one of the places to eat in Kathmandu.

**BHUTAN:** *Please note that there is a shortage of hotel/lodge accommodation in Bhutan, and although we pre-book rooms as far in advance as possible, anything can happen and probably will. If, for instance, the royal family suddenly has a visiting delegation, accommodation may be changed at short notice. Additionally, during peak seasons it can sometimes be very difficult to secure not only the hotels/lodges we want, but also too the single rooms we might need. In these circumstances singles may occasionally be asked to share and in such cases we refund any single room supplements that might apply. Given these conditions we will make every effort to secure any of the following hotels:*

**Paro: Olathang Hotel.** Originally built for the coronation of the 4<sup>th</sup> King in 1974, this attractive hotel stands on a hill overlooking Paro town. Accommodation is spread between the main building and a number of cottages in the grounds. Bedrooms are of a good standard, the staff are friendly and decoration and furnishings are of typical Bhutanese style. We have always found the food to be of a high quality. During busy periods you may also stay at **Tenzinling Hotel**, **Khangkhu Resort Hotel**, **Tashi Namgay Resort & Spa** or **Deked Resort**.

**Thimphu: Phuntsho Pelri Hotel.** Despite its somewhat gloomy looking entrance hall, this new hotel is very well appointed, with custom made Bhutanese pine furniture and good sized rooms. During busy periods, especially during festivals, we may use the **Jomolhari Hotel**, the **Druk Hotel** or the **New Motithang Hotel**. These are amongst the best tourist class hotels in Thimphu.

**Punakha: Damchen Resort.** The Damchen Resort is a newly renovated hotel sitting on the banks of the river in the Punakha valley. Rooms are clean and bright with wooden furniture and nice decorative touches. The hotel is a short, level walk from the small town of Khuruthang. During busy periods you may stay at the **Meri Phunsum Lodge**, which sits high above the Punakha valley with panoramic views of the fields, terraces and river below. A little higher up the hill is the **Hotel Zangtok Pelhri**.

**Jakar (Bumthang District): Hotel Ugyenling.** This newly built hotel has very well appointed rooms, with wood burning stoves, seating area, outdoor terrace/balcony and custom Bhutanese designed furniture. During busy periods, you may stay at the new **Hotel Pelling**, similar in style to the Ugyenling, or a tourist Guest House such as **River Lodge**, or **Rinchling Lodge**.

**Gangtey: Dewachen Hotel.** This new lodge at Gangtey is a lovely property with excellent views across the valley, wood burning stoves and well fitted bathrooms. As it only has a small number of rooms we sometimes use the **Gakiling**, **Yo Lo Khoe** or **Phunsto Choling Guest House**. **Yangkhil Resort** - This pleasant hotel is set on a hillside within walking distance of Trongsa town with good views of the dzong. The hotel has a pleasant restaurant and the comfortable rooms are set in pretty gardens and have attached facilities.

Please note that although we use some of the very best 'non-luxury' hotels in Bhutan, European standards of professionalism, amenity and service should not be expected. Service in particular is much more 'laid-back' in Bhutan.

**Possible hotel upgrades:** In recent years a number of new luxury 5\* hotels have been built in Bhutan. If you would like to upgrade your hotel in Paro at the beginning or end of your holiday, we would be delighted to arrange this for you at **Uma Paro**. This hotel, a converted noblemans house, offers wonderful comfort and surroundings, with attentive service and high standards. Prices start from £205 per person (based upon shared occupancy of a double/twin-share superior room) or £330 for a single superior room.

We can also offer the **Zhiwalling Hotel**, another hotel of high standard with spa facilities, if the Uma Paro is unavailable.

Alternatively, if you'd like to plan a Tailor Made holiday with some or all nights spent in luxury hotels we would be happy to plan an itinerary for you. As well as **Uma Paro** and **Zhiwalling** we work closely with the **Taj Tashi Hotel** in Thimphu. For further details and prices call our office on **+44(0)1453 844400**

**Meal plan:** Bed and Breakfast in Kathmandu and full board elsewhere.

**Airlines:** **International flights:** We will use a reputable IATA airline such as **Jet**, **Qatar**, **Oman**, **Etihad** or similar - all fly to Kathmandu via their respective home cities as direct flights are not available.

**Druk-Air**, the Bhutanese National airline, is the only airline to fly to Bhutan. Flights into Bhutan are usually rewarded with stunning views of the Himalaya, including Everest, Makalu and Kangchenjunga.



**Mountain Kingdoms** aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included - you won't get any nasty shocks!

**Therefore the price includes:**

- ✓ A Bhutanese leader
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ All internal flights and hotel/airport transfers
- ✓ Dwarika's Hotel in Kathmandu, bed & breakfast on twin-share basis
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ In Bhutan, good standard hotel accommodation in main towns and best available hotels in outlying towns, on full board, twin-share basis.
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms kitbag
- ✓ Bhutanese Visa

**The price does not include:**

- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Visa fees for Nepal
- ✗ Lunch and evening meals in Kathmandu
- ✗ Nepal airport departure taxes
- ✗ Optional trips
- ✗ Tips

**OPTIONAL SINGLE SUPPLEMENT** - available for solo travellers who would prefer not to share accommodation:

**Single room:** £465

**Insurance:** From: £102 *Please contact the office for details - +44 (0)1453 844400*

## Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for **2** people. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. During 2013 many trips were full. Therefore if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice we do advise you to book early.

## Flight availability

We would recommend booking any holiday which includes flights to Kathmandu at least six months prior to your planned travel dates. We normally have no difficulties securing flights at shorter notice than this, but this may occasionally require the use of longer routings and/or payment of a flight supplement, reflecting either lack of availability or the need to use alternative airlines.

## Flight Inclusive Price 'From'

Our primary aim is to enable you to secure the cheapest possible flight for your chosen holiday. When making your booking we will quote you the cheapest Flight Inclusive Price available. You then have the choice of accepting our price, or finding a cheaper flight elsewhere. Remember if you take our Land Only option you are still financially covered under our ABTOT bond. (If you are booking your own international flights please check with us first to see whether your trip is up and running).

Our Flight Inclusive Price 'from' is an indication price only. The earlier you can make your booking the greater your chance of securing the best possible price! Our 'Early Bird' discount also helps!

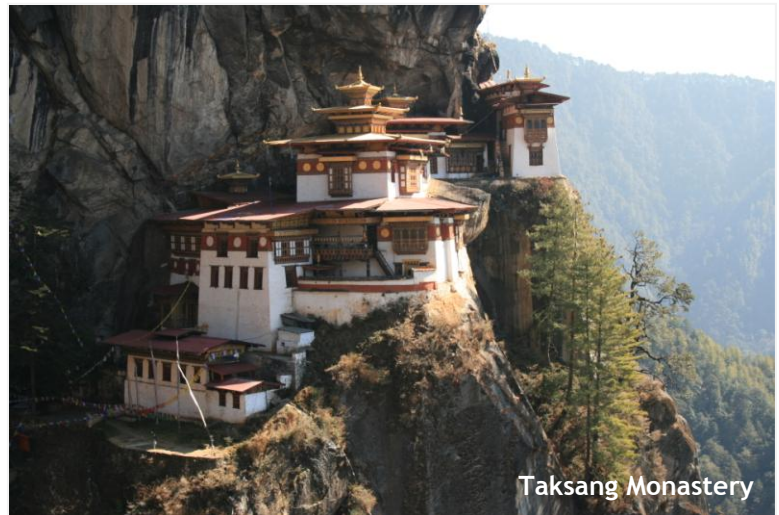
Be assured our Flights Department is dedicated to obtaining the best possible price for you. Please call us to hold a space on your chosen tour and we will then provide you with our best possible flight quote. Ring **+44 (0)1453 844400** and ask for the Flights Department.







Wangdi Market



Taksang Monastery



Thimphu Dzong



Punakha Valley



Gangtey Valley



Paro Dzong







## What our clients say about this trip:

*"A superb holiday. I had some experiences I thought I would never have in my lifetime. Wonderful. Can't wait to book my next holiday!" - Dr L, Wiltshire*

*"This was an excellent trip to a beautiful and interesting country. Group size was just right for a mix, guide full of information and very well organised" - Mr S, Yorkshire*

*"A brilliant holiday - Thank You. Bhutan was stunning and we were well looked after. We will certainly use your services again" - Mr & Mrs L, Wiltshire*

*"The choice of local guide and driver added immensely to the overall holiday experience. In particular their ability to immerse us in local culture was outstanding. We liked the choice of hotels, particularly the more rustic ones, which reflected Bhutanese lifestyle and culture. In Kathmandu, Dwarika's was superb particularly the relaxing ambience and wonderful architecture" - Dr & Mrs T, Dunfermline*

*"It exceeded all expectations, plus we had so much fun with our group. Terrific organisation right from the word go when our dossier arrived. Excellent day to day itinerary. Can't heap on enough praises and would recommend you to anyone interested". C & B M, Switzerland*

*"Your expertise and knowledge of the country showed in the itinerary and dossier provided. Everything ran smoothly. You gave me a holiday which I will always remember. I embarked on it feeling that I was in safe hands". Ms G, Lancs*

*"The holiday was wonderful - truly the adventure of a lifetime. Bhutan is a magical Shangri La, beautiful scenery, quite stunning views - almost a lost world. Everything was perfectly organised, Mountain Kingdoms is quite simply the best holiday company we have ever travelled with. Thank you." Mrs C, West Sussex*

*"It was a well organised itinerary with an excellent, knowledgeable guide. Good variety of activities with extras added according to the group's wishes. I felt looked after which was a relaxing way to travel". Ms D, Hampshire*







## Reasons to book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms:

- With over 26 years' experience of the country we are the UK's leading operator taking people to Bhutan. We annually take well over 150 people to the Kingdom. Our original interest in the country stems from our MD Steve Berry's attempt to climb Gangkar Punsum, which remains the highest unclimbed mountain in the world. This was the first UK climbing expedition in the Kingdom. (His book 'Thunder Dragon Kingdom' is available for purchase from our office).
- The majority of our office team have trekked and travelled in Bhutan. From our in-depth knowledge of the country, we have pioneered many of the routes which are now considered 'classics' and have consistently been the first UK company to take clients into the remotest regions.
- The idea for this holiday stemmed from our very successful Gentle Trekking trips in Nepal and we were the first UK company to design and offer an itinerary combining the best day hikes and sightseeing in Bhutan with comfortable hotels and lodge accommodation. Recently staff members have looked at new walks which have improved this trip.
- We work alongside the oldest and largest travel company in Bhutan which gives us a considerable advantage in securing flight tickets (which are always notoriously overbooked). Our partners also own many of the county's best hotels - as a result of which we have unparalleled access.
- Compared to other UK operators our itineraries offer more time in Bhutan and therefore more chance to experience the magic of this unique country.
- While in Kathmandu you will stay at the 5\* Dwarika's Hotel, unique and one of the best hotels in Kathmandu. It has won heritage awards for its work in preserving and restoring Nepal's architectural heritage and as such is very much a 'living museum'.
- As our minimum group size for this trip is only 2 it is extremely likely to get "up and running". Some of our competitors have larger minimum group sizes and therefore regularly have to cancel "under-subscribed" treks.
- Unlike many of our competitors we impose a maximum group size of 12 for this trip. This provides for a genuine small group travel experience and helps reduce the negative aspects associated with larger tour groups.
- We are an IATA accredited agent and work directly with some of the world's major airlines. If you wish to fly with a specific airline or on alternative dates to the main group we will be happy to arrange this for you.
- We routinely research and make a reconnaissance of our new trips ourselves. We believe this underlines our commitment to ensuring you have the best possible experience in Bhutan. If you have any questions about this trip, please contact Ann Sainsbury who is very familiar with the sights, treks and journeys included in this trip and should be able to answer any queries you may have.

