



# ITINERARY

Bhutan Tourism Corporation LTD

A LENS TO BUDDHISM (11 DAYS)

All Seasons all Year, 2023

**T**HIS TRIP OFFERS a relaxed holiday covering western Bhutan. Western Bhutan is known for its stunning scenery, with rice paddies, apple orchards, and rivers flowing down the mountain valleys. Most of the houses are painted with traditional designs and offer the visitor the opportunity to discover arts, architecture, and the day-to-day activities of the Bhutanese. The trip covers spectacular dzongs (fortresses) and monasteries in Paro, Thimphu, and Punakha.

Programs during a festival period must be confirmed 100 days prior to arrival and are

subject to any hotel supplement levied by the hotel for that particular festival.

*Recommended for non-festival period: Thursday to Tuesday, or Friday to Wednesday program.*

- *Paro Festival: April 2 to April 6, 2023*
- *Thimphu Festival: Sept 24 to 26, 2023*
- *Jambay Lhakhang Festival: October 28 to November 1, 2023*

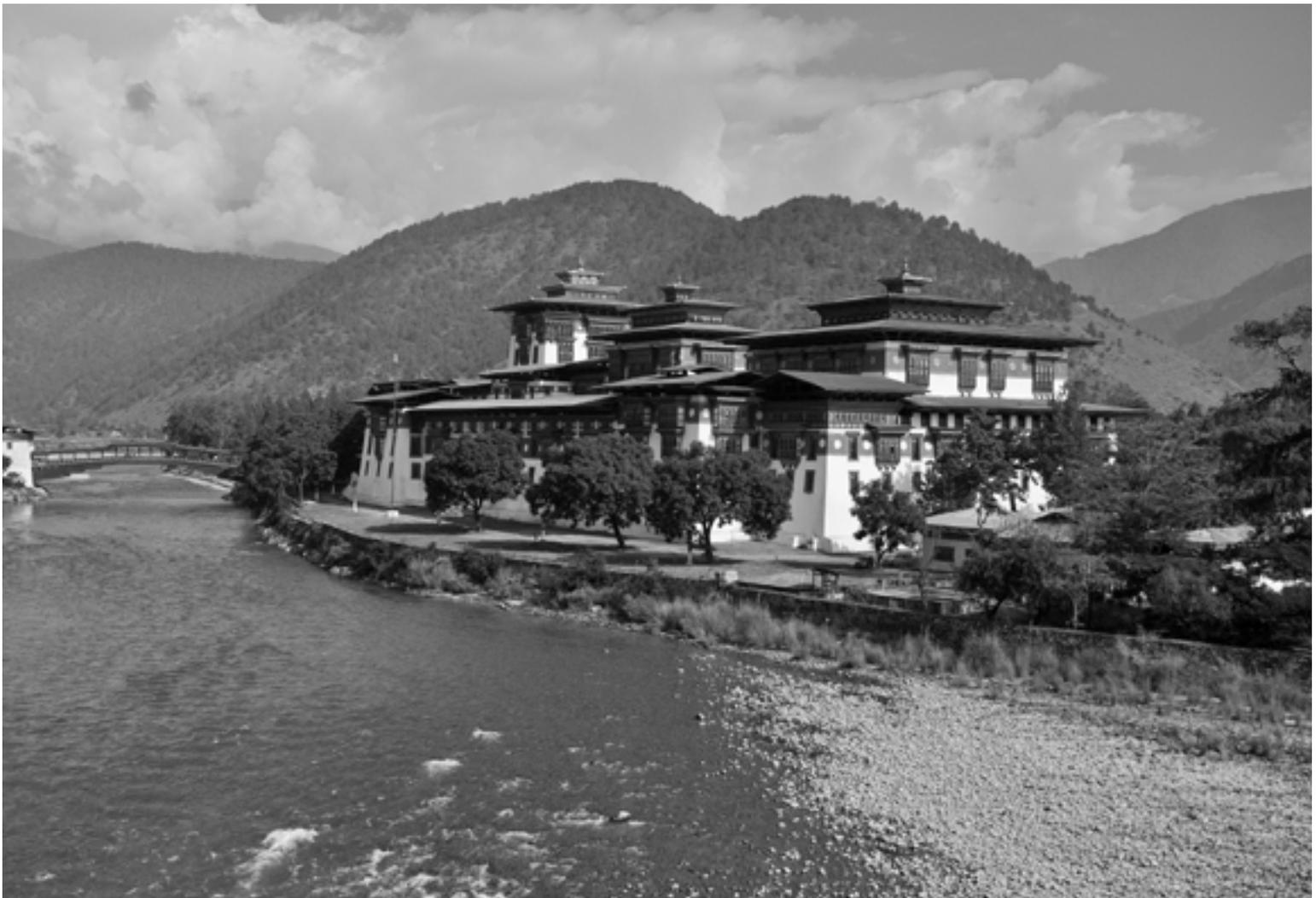
## WESTERN BHUTAN

**Day One** (*Arrive Paro–Thimphu*)



Arriving at *Paro International airport* and upon clearing immigration and customs, you will meet with your guide and driver. Drive about 1 hour 30 minutes to *Thimphu* (2,286m), the capital of Bhutan.

After lunch at the hotel, visit the *Memorial Chorten*, built in 1974 in loving memory of the Third King, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, where a multi-storied Stupa and numerous paintings are exhibited providing an insight into Buddhist philosophy.





Visit the *Royal Textile Academy*, which provides an excellent introduction about the techniques, style of various textiles woven in the country along with exhibition of the national dress ‘gho’ for men and ‘kira’ for women.

Visit the *Handicraft Emporium* which offers a wide range of colorful, hand woven textiles and other products.

### (THIMPHU FESTIVAL)

If you are traveling during the period of the Thimphu festival, our compelling program showcases some of the most sacred and spectacular dances performed by monks and laity, invoking the deities of Tantric Buddhism.

*The Black Hat Dance, the Lord of Cremation Dance, and the Drametse Drum Dance* are just a few of the main dances you could witness. The order of the sightseeing will be changed as government institutions will be closed such as the National Library.

If your visit falls from Friday till Sunday, then visit the weekend vegetable market held at the *Centenary Farmers Market*. The market provides an opportunity to mingle with the local people and sample local organic produce. Local arts and crafts are also available.

**Day Three (Thimphu–Punakha Sightseeing)** The first stop after leaving Thimphu is *Dochula pass* at 10,007 ft. (23km from Thimphu–45 minutes’ drive), where you can see one of Bhutan’s most enchanting views. If weather permits, from this pass, the breathtaking peaks of Bhutan’s northern border can be viewed.

At Dochula, you will also see a unique cluster of *108 Namgyel Khangzang Chortens* that spiral up to the main Chorten known as the “Druk Wangyal Khangzang Chortens”. Her Majesty The Queen Mother, *Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck*, dedicated these chortens as a tribute and monument to the selfless service and visionary leadership of our Fourth King, His Majesty *Jigme Singye Wangchuck*. The Chortens are also a celebration of the stability and progress that His Majesty the King brought to the nation. These chortens are a new landmark for travelers as they cross Dochula, the first mountain pass into the interior of the country.

Reaching the village of *Sopsokha*, you can walk about 20 minutes across the rice fields up to the monastery, *Chimi Lhakhang*. It was built by *Lama Drukpa Kuenley* (also known as the Divine Madman by the West). It is believed that childless women who visit the monastery will conceive after receiving the ‘wang’ (blessing).

Blessed with a temperate climate and drained by the *Phochu* and *Mochu* rivers, is the fertile valley of Punakha. The District has hosted several historical events such as: It was the Capital of Bhutan since 1651 till 1956. The First King, *Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck* was enthroned in 1907 and the first session of the National Assembly was held in 1955. It is still the winter residence of His Holiness the *Je Khenpo* (Chief Abbot of Bhutan) and *Zhung Dratshang* (the Central Monk Body).

### CENTRAL BHUTAN

**Day Four (Punakha–Bumthang)** Proceed to *Trongsa*, via *Wangduephodrang*, which is located on a ridge that plunges into the *Puna Tsang River* flowing below. Sitting atop the ridge with a commanding view of the valleys below is the *Wangduephodrang Dzong*

Visit *Changangkha Lhakhang*, an ancient temple built in the thirteen century by *Lam Phajo Dugom Zhigo*, situated on a ridge above the city.

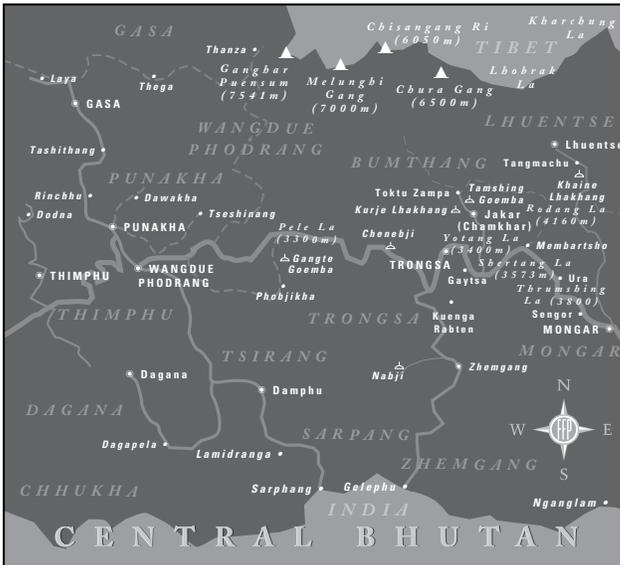
Visit the *Takin Preserve*, where you can see the national animal of Bhutan (Takin).

In the evening, you will visit *Tashichho Dzong* (the fortress of the glorious religion). *Tashichho Dzong* houses His Majesty’s Secretariat and the Central Monk Body. You can see the National Assembly building across the river.

**Day Two (Thimphu Tour)** Visit the *National Library*, established in the 1960s, which holds a vast collection of ancient Buddhist manuscripts and a small collection of books.

*Institute of Zorig Chusum* (commonly known as the Painting School) where you can see young children learning and practicing the ancient arts and crafts of Bhutan. *Zorig Chusum* literally means the thirteen traditional arts and crafts.





(recently caught fire in June 2012. Plans are there to reconstruct the Dzong). The district of Wangduephodrang is also famous for its bamboo products, slate and stone carvings.

Drive across *Pelela Pass* (3,400m) through *Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park*, which divides western Bhutan from central Bhutan. Cross *Nikka Chu Bridge* to enter the heavily

cultivated Trongsa regions in central Bhutan. Beside the stream, is the white stupa—*Chendebji Chorten*—built in the 19th century and designed similar to *Swayambhunath Stupa* in Nepal, that stands below the road as testimony to the subjugation of a demon by Lam Shida.

Visit *Trongsa Dzong* built in 1647 by *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel*. This Dzong is a labyrinth of temples, corridors and offices holding court over the local community. An architectural masterpiece, it is built on many levels into the sides of the hill, and can be seen from every approach to Trongsa, declaring its strength and majesty.

Continue your drive to Bumthang across the *Yotang La Pass* (3,425m). Enroute stop at *Zungney* (2,750m) to see the traditional weavings of *Yathra*—the woolen fabric in numerous colors and patterns.

Bumthang (2,800m) is one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the heartland of Buddhism. Here, the great teachers

meditated and left in their wake many sacred grounds. Guru Rimpoche and his lineage of *Tertons*, the treasure discoverers, have laid to the sprouting of many temples in the valley.

**Day Five (Bumthang Tour)** Start the tour of the valley with a visit to Jambay Lhakhang. This monastery was built in the 7th century by the Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. It is one of the 108 monasteries built by him to subdue evil spirits in the Himalayan region. Its present architectural appearance dates from the early 20th century.

### (JAMBAY LKACHANG FESTIVAL)

If attending the *Jambay Lhakhang festival*, Jambay Lhakhang fire blessing is the night before the first full day of dances. At night, devout Buddhist pass through a burning arch that removes all obstacles within their lives and increases longevity, luck, and power. Prior to the lighting of the arch, a high lama performs a cleansing ceremony throwing blessed mustard seeds outside the temple area to expel evil spirits and consecrate the grounds. The next morning, you may see the Black Hat dancers perform the re-enactment of the murder of the anti-Buddhist king, a fast-moving victory dance that dates to the 9th century. The Jambay Lhakhang festival is





one of the most popular fall festivals in Bhutan.

Visit *Kurjey Lhakhang*, consisting of three temples. The one on the right was built in 1652 on the rock face where *Guru Padmasambhava* meditated in the 8th century. The middle temple is built on the site of a cave containing a rock with the imprint of Guru's body. The temple on the left was built in the 1990s by Her Majesty The Royal Grandmother, *Ashi Kesang Wangmo Wangchuck*. These three temples are surrounded by a 108 chorten walls.

Visit *Jakar Dzong*. According to legend, in 1549, when the lamas assembled to select a site for a monastery, a big white bird rose suddenly in the air and settled on a hill. This was interpreted as an important omen, and the hill was chosen as the site for a monastery—*Jakar Dzong*, which roughly translates as 'Castle of the White Bird'.

*Tamshing Lhakhang* is located opposite Kurjey Lhakhang on the other side of the river. This temple was founded in 1501 by *Terton Pema Lingpa*, the re-incarnation of *Guru Padmasambhava*. The monastery has very ancient religious paintings like the 1,000 Buddhas and 21 Taras (female form of *Buddhisatava*). The temple was restored at the end of the 19th century.

**Day Six (Bumthang Tour Day excursion)** EITHER to *Tang valley* or *Ura village*. Tang is the most remote of Bumthang's valleys. From Jakar it is a 10km drive past the Dechenpelrithang sheep farm to an unpaved road that leads to the north. The road passes *Chel*, Pema Lingpa's birth place, where there is a small chorten, but no longer a village. The road continues past the school at Rimochen to *Mishitang*, 15km from the paved road. The ground continues further towards Gamling and on to a sheep breeding project at Wobtang, but it gets rougher the further it goes.

On the hillside above the west side of the valley is *Kunzandrak goemba* which was founded by Pema Lingpa. The monastery can be viewed from the road. Upon reaching Tang, take an hour's hike up to the old *Ugyenchholing Palace* which has now been converted to a museum.

After visiting the museum, drive the same way and enroute, visit *Merbartsho* (Burning

Lake), which is actually a wide spot in the Tang Chhu.

*Terton Pema Lingpa* found several of *Guru Rimpoche's* hidden terma (treasures) here. A wooden bridge crosses the river and is a good vantage point to look down into the lake. The importance of the site is indicated by the extensive array of prayer flags and the small clay offerings called *tsha tsha* in rock niches. It is believed that *Terton Pema Lingpa* had a vision about hidden treasures to be found at the foot of Tang valley as prophesied

many centuries ago by *Guru Rimpoche*. The people of Tang and the local ruler at that time was cynical about it, therefore, Pema Lingpa held a butter lamp in his hand and jumped into the lake. He remained there for a long time and re-emerged holding a chest and a scroll of paper as well as the butter lamp which was still burning bright. Thereafter, the lake was known as *Mebartsho* (the burning lake). This is one of the many sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

Take a day trip to visit *Ura*, south-east of Jakar, which is the highest of the four valleys in Bumthang. *Ura valley* is about 48 kms, an hour and a half drive from the main town. Wide open spaces characterize the valley that sits in the shadow of the *Thrumsingla Pass*, which separates the east from the west of the Kingdom.

*Ura village* and its monastery are a charming stop before the climb to the east. Clustered houses and cobbled streets provide *Ura village* a medieval feel yet a very attractive atmosphere. Visit *Ura Lhakhang* which will give you the notion on the lifestyle of central Bhutanese people. Stop at some local houses in the *Ura village* to see the daily ways of the villagers.

## WESTERN BHUTAN

**Day Seven (Bumthang–Punakha)** Drive to *Punakha*. Enroute visit *Trongsa museum*, an ancient watch tower, which has now been converted to a museum. It was built by *Chogyal Minjur Tempa*, the first Governor of *Trongsa*. It provides the visitor an insight into the significance of *Trongsa* in the history of Bhutan.

**Day Eight (Punakha Sightseeing)** Drive towards *Nezergang* and hike about 1 hour 30 minutes to *Khamsum Yuley Namgyel Chorten*, built by The Queen Mother, Her Majesty *Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck* in 1999 for the protection of the country and universal peace in the world.

Visit *Punakha Dzong* located strategically at the junction of the *Pho Chu* and *Mo Chu* rivers, built in 1637 by *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel*. The *Dzong* served as the religious and administrative center of Bhutan until the mid-1950s. It was

here that the dual system of government was introduced in the early 17th century and where the Bhutanese enthroned the First King.

**Day Nine (Punakha–Paro)** In *Paro*, visit *Rinpung Dzong* (the fortress on a heap of jewels). The *Dzong* was built by *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel* in 1646.

## (PARO FESTIVAL)

If you are traveling at the time of the *Paro festival*, our compelling program showcases the *Paro festival* with its sacred dances performed by monks and laity, invoking the deities of Tantric Buddhism. A popular one is the sacred *Black Hat Dance*, which re-enacts the death of the anti-Buddhist King, and symbolizes victory over the enemy. The festival takes place in the *Rinpung Dzong*.

Drive to the end of the valley and visit the ruins of *Drugyel Dzong*. It was built by *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel* in 1649 to commemorate Bhutan's victory over the Tibetan invaders.

Enroute to *Paro town*, visit *Kyichu Lhakhang*. *Kyichu Lhakhang* is said to have been built by *King Songtsen Gampo* of Tibet. It is believed that it holds down the left foot of an ogre, so large that it covers Bhutan and most of eastern Tibet. It is one of the 108 temples built by the Tibetan King in one day throughout the region of the Himalayas; according to legend. The temple also houses a museum dedicated to late *Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche* and hosts a range of artefacts belonging to the *Rimpoche*.

**Day Ten (Paro Tour)** Day hike to *Taksang Monastery*. *Taksang* meaning "Tiger's Nest", is built around a cave in which *Guru Rimpoche* (also known as *Guru Padmasambhava*) meditated. The monastery clings seemingly impossible to a cliff at 914m above the valley floor.

For the local people it is a place of pilgrimage, but for a tourist, a hike up to the viewpoint opposite the monastery is exhausting, thrilling and mystical. Legend has it that *Guru Rimpoche* is said to have flown to the site of the monastery on the back of a tigress and meditated in the cave.

**Day Eleven (Departure)** Transfer and departure from *Paro International Airport*.

**Approximate land price \$4040:** per person, sharing a room. Minimum of two people to operate this trip, or \$4840 for single person.

The package rate is the minimum rate applicable per tourist per night in Bhutan. Any additional services or a higher grade room/hotel would contribute to a higher cost for the package.

*Druk Airlines:* from \$1000 per person round-trip from *Bangkok* to *Paro*.

*Druk Airlines* from other gateway cities: prices available upon request.

