

DRUK PATH TREK:

Day 01. Arrive Paro: The flight into Paro on our national carrier, Druk Air, is a befitting introduction to the spectacular beauty of our country. In clear weather, magnificent views of the world's highest peaks give way as you land in the lush green Paro Valley. Your Bhutanese escort from Dragon Adventures will greet you on arrival, and then drive you the short distance to the hotel.

Day 02. Paro: Your journey into the Thunder Dragon Kingdom will truly begin with a drive in the morning to the ruins of the Drukgyal Dzong 16 km up the valley. Built in 1647 by the great Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, father and unifier of medieval Bhutan, the dzong was destroyed by accidental fire and left in ruins as an evocative reminder of the great victories it was built to commemorate. Explore the ramparts and on a clear day experience an unforgettable view of Mt. Jhomolhari. On the return, visit Kichu Lhakhang, built in 659 A.D by the Tibetan king Srongsen Gampo. After lunch in Paro, we will visit Ta Dzong (built in 1656 and renovated in 1968), an ancient watchtower, which now houses the National Museum. Below the museum is the Paro Rimpung Dzong (literally meaning "Heap of Jewels") built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. It is the centre of civil and religious authority in this valley. A short walk takes us to the base of the dzong and across a traditional cantilevered, covered bridge. Nearby is one of the innumerable archery grounds. (Archery is the national sport of Bhutan). If we are lucky, we may catch a match in action. The evening ends with a stroll through Paro's main shopping district.

Day 03. Excursion to Taktshang Monastery: It will be a very special day, with an excursion to view the spectacular Taktshang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery. After breakfast a short drive takes us to Satsam Chorten, from there a two hour horse ride up to the viewpoint point of the monastery. The trail climbs through beautiful pine forest, many of the trees festooned with Spanish moss, and an occasional grove of fluttering prayer flags. We stop for a rest and light refreshments at the Taktsang Jakhang (cafeteria) and then walk a short distance until we see, clearly and seemingly within reach, Taktshang Monastery. The first part was built around Guru Rimpoche's meditation cave in the 1684 by the Penlop of Paro, Gyaltsen Tenzin Rabgay. This incredible monastery clings to the edge of a sheer rock cliff that plunges 900 meters into the valley below. Legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava (Guru Rimpoche), the tantric mystic who brought Buddhism to Bhutan, flew here on the back of a flying tiger, Dorji Drolo, said to be his favorite consort. Lunch is served at the cafeteria.

Day 04. Paro - Jele Dzong (Start of Trek): (Distance 10 kms. Time 3/4 hours. Altitude 3,350 m, 11,000 ft.) Today is a short trek. It begins above the National Museum; we climb till we reach camp. If the weather is clear the Paro valley and the snow-capped mountains can be seen. The campsite is near the old Jele Dzong. If the caretaker is there we can visit the dzong.

Day 05. Jele Dzong - Jangchulakha: (Distance 12 kms. Time 4/5 hours. Altitude 3,700 m, 12,100 ft.) The trek starts with a short climb and then passes through a thick alpine forest of rhododendron and slopes gradually till we reach the night camp. You may see yak herders around the campsite.

Day 06. Jangchulakha - Jimilangtso: (Distance 16 kms. Time 6/7 hours. Altitude 3,800 m, 12,500 ft.) Today the trail follows the ridge and on clear days the views of the

mountains and valleys are spectacular. Our camp is close to Lake Jimilangtso. The lakes in this area are known for their giant sized trout, and if lucky, you may enjoy well-prepared trout for dinner.

Day 07. Jimilangtso – Simkota: (Distance 12 kms. Time 4/5 hours. Altitude 3,800 m, 12,500 ft.) The trail winds through dwarf rhododendron trees past the Lake of Janetso. Overnight camp.

Day 08. Simkota - Phajoding – Thimphu: (Distance 12 kms. Time 4/5 hours. Altitude 3,500 m, 11,500 ft.) From here we slowly descend down to Phajoding Monastery from where the capitol Thimphu is visible at the valley floor. Overnight camp.

Day 09. Thimphu Sightseeing: We trek into Thimphu. Our sightseeing begins with a visit to the National Memorial Chorten built in 1974 in honor of our late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, and the Dupthop Lhakhang one of the few surviving nunneries in Bhutan. We then visit the National Library, stocked with ancient Buddhist manuscripts, and the Painting School where traditional art is still kept alive through instructions in the art of painting Thangkas (sacred Buddhist religious scrolls). After lunch, we drive to the Traditional Medicine Institute where medicines are prepared according to ancient practices, and to Lungtenzampa to observe the Royal silversmiths and a Bhutanese paper factory at work. Other highlights include a visit to the Tashichho Dzong, seat of the national government and the Central Monastic Body, including the summer residence of the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot of Bhutan). We finally visit the Handicrafts Emporium followed by shopping for souvenirs in the shops of Thimphu. Overnight in hotel.

Day 10. Thimphu – Punakha: (72 kms, 3 hrs drive). After breakfast, we will drive to Punakha via Dochula pass. If the weather is clear, we stop for a while at Dochula to view the Higher Himalayas. Lunch will be in Punakha. Afterwards, we will visit Punakha Dzong built in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and situated between Pho Chu (male river) and Mo Chu (female river). For many years until the time of the second king, it served as the seat of government. The construction of the dzong was foretold by Guru Rimpoche, who predicted, "...a person named Namgyal will arrive at a hill that looks like an elephant." At one time there was a smaller building here called Dzong Chu that housed a statue of Buddha. It is said that Shabdrung ordered the architect, Zowe Palep, to sleep in front of the statue. While Palep was sleeping, the Shabdrung took him in his dreams to Zangtopelri and showed him the palace of Guru Rimpoche. From his vision, the architect conceived the design for the new dzong which, in keeping with the tradition, was never committed to paper. The Dzong was named Druk Pungthang Dechen Phodrang "Palace of Great Happiness." The war materials captured during the battle with Tibetans are preserved here. Because it is warmer in Punakha, it is still the winter residence of the Je-Khenpo. Also, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk convened the first National Assembly here. In the evening, we visit the Chime Lhakhang, which was built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley. He subdued the demons with his "Magical Thunder Bolt." This temple is also known as "the Temple of Fertility." Overnight in hotel.

Day 11. Punakha – Thimphu – Paro: After breakfast, drive to Paro via Thimphu. Lunch at Thimphu. Afternoon, free for shopping and wandering. In the evening, drive to Paro. Overnight in hotel.

Day 12. Departure: Early morning, drive to the airport and farewell.