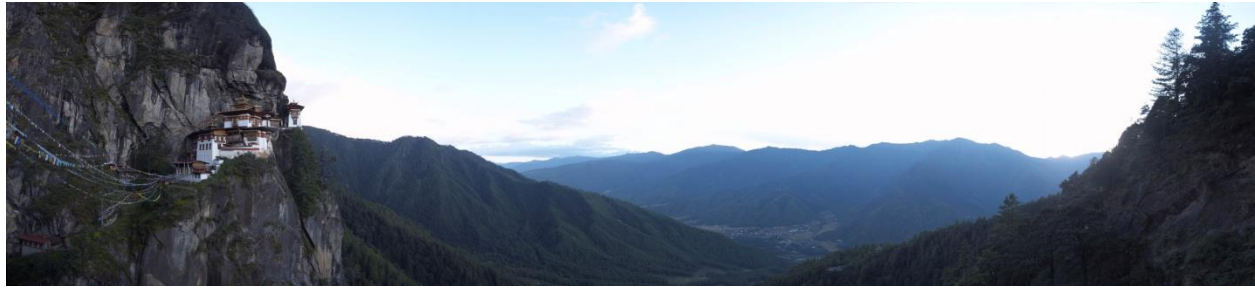


Bhutan Living Culture Tour



Sample itinerary that can be customized:

Day 01

✈ Bangkok – Paro – Thimphu 🚗

Flying into the country's only airport, in the beautiful Paro valley, the clear mountain air, forested ridges, imposing monasteries and welcoming Bhutanese people in their striking national dress, provides a breath-taking first impression.

On arrival proceed to the immigration counter and your Bhutan Visa will then be stamped in your passport. After clearing customs & immigrations your Bhutanese escort from **Discovery Bhutan Inc** will greet you and then drive you through the lush green valley of Paro. Starting of your Spiritual tours, start with the visit to Kyichhu Lhakhang (oldest temple); Go back in time and history and visit the 7th century Kyichhu temple. As the name suggests, the temple is a reservoir of peace, where you will really feel at peace here.

Next to the temple is the house that is now turned into a museum dedicated to the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. One can come across photographs and other artefacts belonging to Rinpoche. Then we will return back to Paro town for lunch at Yueling Restaurant.

Afternoon we will then stroll down to the Paro Dzong and take in the amazing architecture of this 17th century monument, a premier example of Bhutan's architecture. Paro Dzong, built in 17th century to defend Paro from the Tibetan invasion, is also known as Rinpung Dzong, which means the 'fortress on a heap of jewels'. This fine example of Bhutanese architecture now serves as a central monastic and administrative seat of the Paro district. From the Dzong, a leisurely walk back into Paro town crosses the scenic Nyamai zampa, a unique model of Bhutan's traditional cantilever bridge.

Then departs for Thimphu, one-hour drive from one main valley to the next, through paddy fields, apple orchards, farmhouses and paddy stacks. You will see farmers working in the field, numerous cattle, pine trees and hamlets that smell of burning wood. Thimphu is the capital city of the Kingdom of Bhutan. One of the charms of this unique capital is Bhutan's own version of the colonial traffic policemen, who will fascinate you with their elaborate hand gestures.



Day 02



Thimphu Sightseeing



We will drive 12km north of Thimphu to hike to Tango and Cheri monasteries. It will take about 45 minutes to hike to the monastery. Tango Monastery is a Buddhist college, and it's the residence of the Desi Tenzin Rabgye, a young boy who is the reincarnation of the 16th-century monk who built Tango. We will then hike to Cheri monastery, which is also about a 45-minute hike. Return back to Thimphu.

After lunch, visit Buddha Dordenma, It is a gigantic Shakyamuni Buddha statue which is sited amidst the ruins of Kuensel Phodrang, the palace of Sherab Wangchuck, the 13th Druk Desi, overlooking the southern approach to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. It will be the one of the largest Buddha stupas in the world, at a height of 169 feet (51.5 meters).

Apart from commemorating the centenary of the Bhutanese monarchy, it fulfills two prophecies. In the 20th century, the renowned yogi Sonam Zangpo, prophesied that a large statue of either Padmasambhava, Buddha or of a Phurba would be built in the region to bestow blessings, peace and happiness on the whole world. Additionally the statue is mentioned in the ancient terma of Guru Padmasambhava himself, said to date from approximately the 8th century, and recovered some 800 years ago by tertön Pema Lingpa.

Visit the Weekend Market, A wide range of agricultural produce and other food products from Thimphu and other parts of the country are brought here for trading. A variety of local arts and crafts are sold at the market, which runs from Friday afternoon to Sunday. A visit to the market provides great photo opportunities, as well as the chance to mingle with local people and perhaps buy souvenirs.

Visit the National Memorial Chorten; the building of this landmark was originally envisaged by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who had wanted to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it is both a memorial to the Late King ("the father of modern Bhutan"), and a monument to peace

Visit Tashichhodzong, which was built in 1641 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and reconstructed in 1962, by the Late King, His Majesty, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. The building we see today is largely a modern affair, built in 1962 when His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk moved the government to Thimphu after a fire at its original location. The complex's central tower is original. Tashichhodzong houses the main secretariat building, throne room of His Majesty the King of Bhutan. During the warmer summer months the monk body headed by His Holiness, the Je Khenpo, makes its home in the dzong.

Visit the government-run Handicrafts Emporium and privately owned crafts shops, which offer a wide range of handcrafted products, including the splendid thanangka paintings and exquisitely woven textiles for which Bhutan is famous.

Day 03**Thimphu – Gangtey**

Today we will take a drive to Punakha (02 hours) across Dochu La (3050m) from where one can have a spectacular view of the Himalayas to the north when the sky is clear. The pass is marked by 108 chortens (Stupa), which are Buddhist reliquaries, memorials to the teachings of the Buddha. Sometimes actual relics of the Buddha or revered monks are inserted into the dome of the stupa, but whether or not there are relics inside, the stupas mark the landscape with reminders of the Buddha's teachings. You will have lunch at Chhime Lhakhang cafeteria.

Afternoon, hike to Chhime Lhakhang, an ancient monastery near Punakha, dedicated to fertility and founded by Lam Drukpa Kuenley, to pray for children. They get blessed by a symbolic phallus, which represents the sign of fertility and other religious objects of the Lam. It will take only few stories of the Lam to understand why everyone in this magical kingdom believes that the Lam's blessings will help a woman conceive. Then continue our drive to Gangtey/Phobjikha valley. Tonight we will be stay in the Phobjikha, the valley is surely one of the loveliest high altitude valleys in Bhutan. Phobjikha is one of Bhutan's few glacial valleys, and chosen winter home of black-necked cranes, migrating from the Tibetan plateau.

Day 04**Gangtey – Punakha/Wangdue**

In the morning visit the 17th century Gangtey Gonpa, the only Nyingmapa monastery in western Bhutan and it houses about 200 monks. Then we will also visit Gangtey Buddhist Collage and if group is interested then we can arrange Dharma Exchange program. We will also learn how monk live and help their ongoing monastery construction.

Then we will continue our two hour beautiful hike, (Gangtey Nature Trail): (two hours) The most beautiful and shortest of the existing nature trails so that you first have an opportunity to visit this magnificent temple. From here the walk heads south and ends over the meandering chhu Nap (Black river) near Khewang village.

This walk can be done in quick two hours or spread over a day if done at a more leisurely pace. It is an ideal walk for individual travellers and provides one of the overview of the valley as well. One can see skylarks, deer, temples, villages and have a superb view of the valley as there is no forest to obstruct the view.

In the late afternoon return back to Wangdue/Punakha valley.

Day 05



Punakha sightseeing



Today we will visit the Punakha Dzong that was built by Shabdrung, in 1637, on a strategic place at the confluence of Pho Chu and Mo Chu rivers. The Dzong has played a hallowed role in the history of Bhutan. It served as the seat of Shabdrung's government, several foreign delegations were received here in 18th and 19th century, the election and coronation of the first King was observed in 1907 and the Third King convened the first National Assembly in the Dzong. The central monastic body continues to reside here in winter. The embalmed bodies of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Terton Pema Lingpa are housed on the top floor of the main tower. Damaged by four catastrophic fires and an earthquake, the Dzong has been fully restored by the present King from the latest fire in 1987.



You will also visit Khamsum Yulley Namgyal: A 30-minute drive from the Punakha Dzong will bring you to the base of the hill on which this temple is built. From the car park, you have to cross a suspension bridge and walk through rice fields before you start climbing a moderately inclined trail surrounded by pine trees. It takes about 1 hour from the car park to hike up to the temple, and 30 minutes to hike down. During the summer, the walk could be a bit muddy, so be prepared. A hiking pole is recommended.

Khamsum Yulley Namgyal stands majestically on a strategic ridge above the Punakha valley. Built over a period of 9 years, Bhutanese craftsmen including carpenters, painters, and sculptors consulted Holy Scriptures rather than engineering manuals, to construct this 4-storey temple.

It is a splendid example of Bhutan's fine architectural and artistic traditions and the only one of its kind in the world. Built by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, this temple is dedicated for the well being of the kingdom and the benefit of all sentient beings.

Evening you can visit the farm house or can walk near by the river.

Day 06**Wangdue – Paro**

Today leave early for Paro and will spend around one hour at Royal Botanical Park centre then continue drive to Thimphu. We will stop for a lunch at Thimphu and then visit Tashichho Dzong, which has been the seat of the government since 1952 and presently houses the throne room and offices of the king, the secretariat and the ministries of home affairs and finance. Other government departments are housed in buildings nearby.

The dzong is located close to Thimphu town, next to the banks of the Wangchhu River. It is an impressively large structure, surrounded by well-kept lawns and beautiful gardens.

Then continue drive to Paro (just under 1hrs), one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan with its slate-roofed farmhouses, graceful willow trees and rushing glacial river beneath snow covered peaks.

Day 07**Paro Hike to Tiger Nest**

Today there will be a chance to go on an excursion to the Bhutan's most revered and certainly the most famous site, Taktsang Monastery or the 'Tiger's Nest. Taktsang temple (one of the most sacred places in Bhutan due to its association with Guru Rinpoche, who reputedly flew to Paro Taktsang cliff in the form of Guru Dorji Drolo, mounted on a flaming dakini-tigress in the 747 A.D., where he meditated and subdued evil spirits). This is a lifetime opportunity to connect yourself to Guru Rinpoche – 30 minutes personal meditation time or to enjoy the peace and tranquility of this sacred site. A number of temples have now been built on the site, and these occupy precarious positions, clinging to a black cliff high above the Paro Valley. The visit involves a two-hour climb on a steep footpath through beautiful pine forest, many of the trees festooned with Spanish moss, and an occasional grove of fluttering prayer flags.

Day 08**Haa Valley day excursion**

Start the day early with a one-hour drive to Haa via the Chele-la pass. You will have a superb view of the mountains Chomolhari and Jichu Drake, and if the weather is favorable you will stop here to stroll around. Legend says that the Haa valley, before the 8th century, was wrapped up in animist tradition. Still some elements of this belief system exist in form of festivals and rituals. The tantric master Padmasambhava visited the valley in the 8th century and transformed some blood sacrificing animist beliefs into peaceful Buddhist traditions. Ap Chundu and several other deities, once hostile animist forces, were subdued and made the guardians of the land.

You can also visit two important temples in Haa district, the Black Temple and the White Temple were built at the same time as Kyerchu Temple in Paro in the 7th century AD. The two temples can be found near each other at the sacred site known as *Miri Punsum*, or "The Three Brother Hills." A third temple, *Haa Gonpa*, was built at further up the valley at the site where a lame pigeon, actually a bodhisattva in disguised form, was found by a local farmer who was drawn to the spot by a mysterious fire seen on several successive nights and by the unexplained sounds of oboes and trumpets (musical instruments closely associated with Bhutanese and Tibetan monasteries). Return back to Paro.

Day 09**Paro – Bangkok**

After breakfast in the hotel, drive to the airport in time to catch up your onward flight. Your escort from Discovery Bhutan will bid you farewell and soon the remote and legendary Dragon Kingdom disappears again behind its guardian mountains.