Bhutan | Small Group Cultural Tour

Apr 17 2020 to May 03 2020

The Bhutan small group cultural tours are an unhurried journey set in an ocean of calm in a crowded continent. Bhutan is scenically magnificent. The snow-capped mountains of the Himalayas rise above jungle-covered hills and verdant green river valleys where farms and villages are clustered. Bhutanese culture remains almost untouched by the outside world. Centuries of Buddhist tradition inherited from Tibet, their Northern neighbour, shape this land with art, dance and music. Today, Bhutan measures itself in terms of ‘gross national happiness’ instead of GDP. A dignified and hospitable people, the Bhutanese will welcome you to share their distinctive culture, and unpolluted
Small group tours Bhutan itinerary:

From the moment you arrive at Paro airport you enter a different world. Our tour of Bhutan takes in the majestic architecture of Bhutan’s many sacred sites and traditional centres of political power. On our trip, we visit many huge dzongs (or fortresses) and make time to see Buddhist artworks within these and the many smaller temples that dot the country. We also take in traditional Buddhist monasteries, including the iconic ‘Tiger’s Nest’ (Paro Taktshang), which clings to the mountainside above Paro valley. Our tour also visits the remote Haa valley, only recently opened to tourism.

We also explore the capital Thimphu, where we visit the National Museum, and a paper factory where you can see paper crafted by hand. Our tours in Bhutan are generally scheduled around a traditional festival, where you can join the Bhutanese people in commemorating their third king.

Further afield we will visit botanical gardens to view Bhutan’s exotic fauna, including Bhutan’s national animal, the gentle takin. At the National Textile Museum, we see and learn about the creation of Bhutan’s distinctive woven fabrics. We also explore markets where trade continues almost unchanged with the passage of time and have a guided tour of a traditional medicine hospital. We also trek through a beautiful river valley to see an old manor house that hosts a museum of life in earlier days.

A comfortable tour, where English is the second language:

English is Bhutan’s second language. You have time with the local guides to wander and meet local people throughout your travels. Travel around Bhutan in a comfortable modern coach at a slow pace, accompanied by knowledgeable local guides as well as your tour leader. Accommodation is in clean, modern hotels that nonetheless
retain Bhutanese character. You dine on fresh and healthy local produce during the tour.

Our cultural tours of Bhutan are a unique opportunity to see one of the most exotic lands on earth. Bhutan is truly independent, selecting those aspects of the modern world that it needs while retaining its own colourful and fascinating culture. Bhutan is a special place, a destination you will always remember with pleasure and a memory you will always treasure.

For more information about Bhutan, take a look at our articles: Bhutan: the Hidden Kingdom, and our guide to the traditional festivals of Bhutan. Travellers interested in Buddhism and South-East Asian culture might also be interested in our article on Bagan, the ancient capital of Myanmar.

For more details about Odyssey’s Bhutan tour itinerary, click the ‘Top 5’ or 'Itinerary' buttons above! If you’re keen to experience this tour, please call or send an email. Or, to book, simply fill in the form on the right hand side of this page.

Top 5

1. See and shop for Bhutan’s extraordinarily distinctive woven fabrics and other treasures in markets and at the National Textile Museum.
3. Walk to the famous monastery Cheri Gompa.
4. Take a walk through a forest to Bhutan’s iconic “Tigers’ Nest” (Takshang) Buddhist monastery.
5. Tour Bhutan’s great fortresses (dzongs), enormous stone-walled religious and political centres that tower above the surrounding country.
Itinerary

Day 1

Locations: Bangkok

Overview: After arriving in Bangkok, we make our own way to the hotel, where we meet our tour leader and come together for drinks and a tour orientation. We have overnight accommodation at Bangkok Airport for our early flight to Paro.

Accommodation: Best Western Airport Hotel or similar

Day 2

Locations: Paro

Overview: After flying in from Bangkok, we have a day of sightseeing, in and around Paro. We visit Rinpung, which is a large dzong - a Buddhist monastery and fortress - of the Drukpa Lineage of the Kagyu school in Paro District, Bhutan. It houses the district Monastic Body and government administrative offices of Paro Dzongkhag. You will also visit a "Dhapa" workshop (wooden bowl) and well as a visit to the National Museum of Bhutan. The cultural museum was established in 1968, in the renovated ancient Ta-dzong building, above Rinpung Dzong under the command of His Majesty, the King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the third hereditary Monarch of Bhutan. We stay overnight in Paro. (L, D)

Accommodation: Gangtey Palace Hotel or similar

Day 3

Locations: Thimphu

Overview: This morning we drive to Thimphu, stopping at Tamchhog Lhakhang - (1.5 hour drive). We do some sightseeing and visiting the National Textile Museum, handmade paper factory, as well as a handmade paper factory. In the afternoon, we will visit a postal museum as well as the Thimphu Chorten and Changangkha temple
and the Golden Buddha. We stay overnight in Thimphu. (B, L,D)

**Accommodation:** Jomolhari Hotel or similar

**Day 4**

**Locations:** Thimphu

**Overview:** This morning we walk to the famous Cheri Gompa monastery, a walk of about 1 ½ hours (2.7 kms). The trail starts by crossing a lovely covered bridge that spans the Wang Chhu, then climbs steeply to the monastery. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, built this goemba in 1620 and established the first monk body here. A silver chorten inside the goemba holds the ashes of the Shabdrung’s father. In the afternoon we will visit a bustling weekly market, as well as a visit to watch archery, at a nearby stadium., Radio Tower and Takin reserve, Zilukha nunnery and Tashichho Dzong. We stay overnight in Thimphu. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Jomolhari Hotel or similar

**Day 5**

**Locations:** Punakha

**Overview:** In the morning, we drive east to the Dochu-la (la means “pass”), where, weather permitting, there are panoramic views of the Himalayan snow-peaks. The drive takes approximately 4 hours. We will visit the modern Victory Temple at Dochu-la, which was built to commemorate Bhutan’s victory over Indian insurgents in the early 1980’s. In the afternoon, we visit Punakha Dzong, perhaps the most photogenic of Bhutan’s Dzongs, situated at the confluence of two fast-flowing turquoise rivers. We stay overnight in Punakha. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Hotel Vara or similar

**Day 6**

**Locations:** Punakha

**Overview:** This morning we walk to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten (1.5 hours, moderately easy) and visit the famous Suspension Bridge. In the afternoon we visit Chorten Ningpo. Overnight in Punakha.
Day 7

Locations: Trongsa
Overview: In the morning we drive from Punakha to Trongsa via Pele La (5-hour drive). In the afternoon we visit Trongsa Dzong and the royal heritage museum in Ta Dzong. We stay overnight in Trongsa. (B,L,D)
Accommodation: Yangkhil Resort or similar

Day 8

Locations: Bumthang
Overview: In the morning we drive to Bumthang via Yotong La (approx. 4 hours). Bumthang is Bhutan’s second biggest town and an ancient centre of religious beliefs. Spread out widely over a valley, Bumthang is an ancient trading centre and has a number of sacred sites associated with Guru Rinpoche, who is believed to have introduced Buddhism into Bhutan in the 8th century. In the afternoon we will visit Jakar Dzong situated on a ridge above the valley, the 7th century Jambay Lhakang, and the 17th century Kurjey Lhakang. We stay overnight in Bumthang. (B,L,D)
Accommodation: Gongkhar Guesthouse or similar

Day 9

Locations: Bumthang/Tang Valley
Overview: In the morning we drive to the beautiful Tang valley (2 hours drive, each way) where there are several small temples and relics beside a flowing river. We walk across fields and up a hill to Ugyen Chholing Palace, an old manor house that is now a richly endowed folk museum. The palace is located on top of the hill at the village of Kizum, the walk up takes approximately 45 minutes each way. We will take lunch in the gardens overlooking the valley before returning to
Bumthang in the late afternoon. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Gongkhar Guesthouse or similar

**Day 10**

**Locations:** Bumthang

**Overview:** Today we take a three-hour day walk to Ngang Lhakhang (3 hours walk and also accessible via our vehicle if needed), a Buddhist monastery in the Cheokhor Valley of central Bhutan. A private temple, Ngang Lhakhang was built in the 16th century by a Tibetan lama named Namkha Samdrip. We return to our hotel in the evening for dinner. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Gongkhar Guesthouse or similar

**Day 11**

**Locations:** Gangtey

**Overview:** From Bumthang we travel to Gangtey in the remote Phobjikha valley with a stop at Chendibji, where there is a mani wall of sacralised stones and a temple in the Nepali style that is said to ward off the threat from a demoness who formerly lived in this valley. We will have time to stop and enjoy views and sites such as wildlife and yak-herding camps beside the road as we cross mountain passes. The drive today will take approximately 8 hours. We stay overnight in Gangtey. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Hotel Dewachen or similar

**Day 12**

**Locations:** Gangtey

**Overview:** Gangtey is the seasonal home of the Black-necked crane, which migrates across the Himalayas between Gangtey and northern Tibet. We will visit Gangtey Gompa (one of Bhutan’s oldest monasteries and recently extensively renovated) and have the opportunity to walk through the valley and view rural Bhutan, with its distinctive farmhouses and hospitable people. The walk starts at the Dewachen hotel and passes by the Black-Necked Crane Information
Centre, which has lots of information on the valley and its famous migrating birds. From here the clients walk to Beta Village where there is a small school, which they are welcome to visit if it is open. Then the walk continues to Gangtey Gompa from where they can walk along the Gangtey Nature Trail, past Semchubara village, through forests of blue pine trees covered with lichen (known as old man’s beard) and where they can hopefully see some birds. The walk continues from the end of the nature trail to Kingathang village where they can visit a temple built by the Queen Mother. From Kingathang, we walk via Yusa village back to our hotel. The valley is almost entirely flat, and the walks are along a gentle path, the total walk is around 13 km but our vehicle will be available to pick us up at any point of the walk. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Hotel Dewachen or similar

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**Day 13**

**Locations:** Paro

**Overview:** Today, we drive to Paro (approx. 8 hours), stopping on the way to visit Chimi Lhakhang, a temple built in the 15th century by the Bhutan’s famous religious folk-hero, the “Divine Madman” Drukpa Kinley. This popular temple is considered a fertility temple, and many young couples visit it in order to be blessed with children. After we arrive, we have some free time to walk around the city and do some souvenir shopping. We stay overnight in Paro for 4 nights. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Gangtey Palace Hotel or similar

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**Day 14**

**Locations:** Paro

**Overview:** This morning we enjoy some more sightseeing together in Paro, visiting the Rinpung Dzong, a large monastery and fortress tracing back to the Drukpa lineage of Kagyu School. It houses the district Monastic Body and government administrative offices of Paro Dzongkhag. We also visit the National Museum, which features a rich array of displays concerning Bhutan’s religion, culture, and natural history. In the afternoon, we visit the-7th century Kyichu Lhakang, one of Bhutan’s most sacred sites, and the 17th-century Drukgyel Dzong.
with its extraordinarily vivid wall paintings. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Gangtey Palace Hotel or similar

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**Day 15**

**Locations:** Paro

**Overview:** In the morning we drive 30 mins to do the Dzongdra kha hike. The walk 15 minutes from the road to the main temple. Dzongdra kha, also known as Dzongdra nye, is a sacred place of Guru Rimpoche dating back to the 8th century. In the 14th century, the treasure-hunter Gonpo Dorji discovered a crystal stupa and relic of the Buddha on this site. In the afternoon we drive to Sangchen Choekor and have a picnic lunch. Visit the temple and drive back to visit Drugyel Dzong. We walk around town in the evening. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Gangtey Palace Hotel or similar

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**Day 16**

**Locations:** Paro

**Overview:** We rise earlier than usual to visit the spectacularly situated Taktshang monastery, a highlight of any visit to Bhutan. This involves a hike of 3-4 hours to reach the site, on a 900 metre ascent up to the monastery at 3120 meters. There’s a possibility to hire a horse to go up to the halfway point if required. There is a tea-shop around the half way mark which provides excellent views of the monastery, and some visitors are content with reaching this site. We return in time for lunch, and the rest of the day is at leisure in Paro. (B,L,D)

**Accommodation:** Gangtey Palace Hotel or similar

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**Day 17**

**Locations:** Bangkok

**Overview:** We depart Bhutan from Paro airport in the morning. On arrival in Bangkok, we say our farewells and the tours comes to a close. We recommend booking a late evening flight out of Bangkok. (B)

**Accommodation:**
Inclusions / Exclusions

What’s included in our Tour

- International airfares in economy class – Bangkok- Paro-Bangkok with Druk Air.
- 16 nights of hotel accommodation.
- 15 dinners, 15 lunches, and 16 breakfasts
- Services of a Tour Leader.
- Bhutan guide throughout the tour from arrival to departure.
- All sightseeing and entrance fees.
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure and all overland transport within Bhutan.

What’s not included in our Tour

- International flights.
- Items of a personal nature such as drinks, alcohol, laundry, and tips.
- Comprehensive travel insurance.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.