

Bhutan – Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon

Black Crane Festival

3 – 17 November 2025

The remote kingdom of Bhutan has a fascinating cultural and architectural heritage plus beautiful mountain scenery. A highlight of any visit to the country is to witness a Tshechu (Festival); a colourful event accompanied by Buddhist chants and masked dances. This tour is timed to coincide with one of the least tourist visited festivals and is set in one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan. The country continues to preserve its cultural integrity and age-old traditions as revealed in this unique and comprehensive tour, which travels through the fascinating western and central regions of the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon



Black-necked crane dancers, Gangtey Monastery
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ITINERARY

Day 1/2 Fly from London to Kathmandu - 3rd/4th November

Various flight options to Kathmandu. Next day arrival, transfer and overnight at the historic Shanker hotel in the centre of the city (B)

Day 3 Morning flight to Paro, BHUTAN - 5th November

An early morning transfer to the airport for a spectacular mountain flight to Paro from Kathmandu with Druk Air. We visit the National Museum which holds a fascinating collection of art, relics, religious thangka paintings and exquisite postage stamps. Later we visit Rinpung Dzong built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the first spiritual and temporal ruler of Bhutan, the Dzong houses the monastic body of Paro, the office of the Dzongda (district administrative head) and Thrimpon (judge) of Paro district. Overnight in *Khangkhu Resort* hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 4 In Paro – 6th November

We visit Taktshang Monastery (5hrs hike) known as Tiger's Nest, the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery and hence it is called 'Tiger's Nest'. On the way back we visit Drukgyel Dzong built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to commemorate his victory over the Tibetan invaders and Kyichu Lhakhang one of the oldest shrines of the Kingdom dating back to the 7th century (B,L,D)

Day 5 Fly to Bumthang – 7th November

We fly to Bumthang this morning, which is the general name given to a combination of four valleys – Chumey, Choekhor, Tang and Ura with altitude varying from 2,600m to 4,000m. It is home to many of prominent Buddhist temples and monasteries. This afternoon we visit Kurje Lhakhang, where the saint Padmasambhava subdued a local demon and left his body imprint on a rock., the Jambey Lhakhang (7th century temple), Tamshing Lhakhang (housing some of the oldest wall paintings in Bhutan) and Jakar Dzong (administrative centre of the region). Two nights *Mountain View* hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 6 In Bumthang – 8th November

This morning we have a short hike to Lhodrak Kharchhu Monastery founded by Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche in 1984 and has become part of an extensive effort to preserve and revitalize Tibetan culture. The monks' regular curriculum includes reading, memorizing the daily prayers, learning dharma dances, drawing mandalas, learning the melodies of sacred rituals, learning the use of ceremonial instruments and the art of making sacrificial objects, along with the basics of contemplation and instruction on the different stages of tantra. The afternoon is left at leisure to enjoy the atmosphere of the location of Bumthang (B,L,D)

Day 7 Drive from Bumthang to Trongsa – 9th November

We stop at Chumey, a wide fertile valley where wheat, barley, potatoes and buckwheat are cultivated. It is particularly known for its famous wool weaving called "Bumthang Yathra". Later we drive (2.5 hours) to Trongsa crossing Yutong-la pass (3,400m/ 11,155 ft). The road climbs steeply through coniferous forest into a wide, open cultivated valley known as the Chumey valley. Finally the road winds down the pass to Trongsa. On arrival we visit Trongsa Dzong, built in 1648 it was the seat of power over central and eastern Bhutan and Ta Dzong, recently opened fort in Trongsa. The Ta Dzong, a cylindrical stone structure rising five stories, was built in 1652 by Chogyal Minjur Tempa. with eyes painted at four cardinal points. Overnight *Tendrel Resort* hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 8 Drive from Trongsa to Phobjikha Valley – 10th November

Leaving Trongsa we head into the wide and picturesque Phobjikha valley. Phobjikha is one of Bhutan's few glacial valleys, and chosen winter home of black-necked cranes (November – March) migrating from the Tibetan plateau. The valley is one of the most beautiful in Bhutan. We visit Gangtey Goempa (Monastery), the only Nyingmapa monastery in western Bhutan and explore Phobjikha Valley with time to view the Black-Necked Cranes. These great birds, beloved in Bhutan and known as Trung Trung, feed along the marshy Phobjikha valley bottomlands. There are said to be only 1600 of the birds in the world, of which about 400-500 come to Bhutan in November and stay until March. The beauty of the Cranes has given rise to many myths, legends, folktales and songs. Two nights at the Gakhill Resort in Gangtey (B,L,D)

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Day 9 Attend the Black-necked Crane Festival – 11th November

We spend an unforgettable day with the locals at their annual Black-necked Crane Festival. Dancers wear spectacular costumes made of yellow silk or rich brocade, often decorated with ornaments of carved bone. For certain dances, they wear masks which may represent animals, fearsome deities, skulls or just simple human beings. The festival celebrations take place in the courtyard of Gantey Gumpa and focus on celebrating the arrival of the Black Neck Cranes who make the Phobjika Valley there home during the winter months. The festival centres around cultural dances and songs, often containing reference to the birds, and makes use of Bhutans traditional carved wooden masks. There is a large focus on conservation of the area and the cranes habitat during the festival. (B,L,D)

Day 10 Drive to Punakha – 12th November

After breakfast we drive (5 hours) to Punakha via Dochula pass (3,050m) arriving at Wangduephodrang town in time for lunch. In the morning we cross Pelela pass (3,300 m), the traditional boundary between east and west. The pass is marked by a large prayer flag and the ground is covered with high altitude dwarf bamboo. Stop en route at Chendbjhi Chorten, which was built in 18th century by a Lama named Shida, it is Nepalese in style. On arrival at Punakha we check-in to our hotel and spend the rest of the day in leisure or exploring Punakha village located right on the bank of river. Two nights in Zimkham Resort with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 11 In Punakha – 13th November

After breakfast we hike to Khamsum Yuelay Namgyal Choeten, a moderate half hour hike through the rice paddies. Next we visit Punakha Dzong, a fortress built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1637. Punakha served as the capital of Bhutan until 1955 and it still is the winter residence of the Central Monk Body. Later enjoy a picnic lunch on the banks of the Punak Chhu in the stunning dzong which straddles the confluence of the Mo Chhu (Mother River) and Pho Chhu (Father River). After lunch we drive to the village of Talo for a walk in the beautiful and quiet grounds of the village temple and visit the home village of the Kingdom's four Queens (B,L,D)

Day 12 Drive Punakha to Thimphu. Visit Thimphu – 14th November

Our drive (3 hours) this morning is via the Dochula Pass (3100m). The pass is marked by a large massive choeten, 108 smaller choetens (Druk Wangyel Choetens) and prayer flags. The pass offers the most spectacular view over the high peaks of the eastern Himalayas. We arrive at Thimphu the capital town of Bhutan and the centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimphu is a unique city with a mixture of modern development alongside ancient traditions. On arrival in Thimphu we check-in to our hotel. After lunch we visit the National Library, which holds a vast collection of ancient Buddhist texts and manuscripts, some dating back several hundred years and the Textile and Folk Heritage Museum - these museums, both of which opened in 2001, provide fascinating insights into Bhutanese material culture and way of life. Two nights at the Kisa Hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 13 In Thimphu – 15th November

This morning we visit the National Memorial Chorten. The building of this landmark was envisaged by the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, as 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 world peace. The paintings and statues inside the monument provide a deep insight into Buddhist philosophy. The afternoon is left free to explore the town perhaps to shop at some of the excellent souvenir market stalls (B,L,D)

Day 14 Drive to Paro – 16th November

We drive to Paro (3 hours) stopping at Chuzom, the confluence of Thimphu and Paro rivers and Tschogang Lhakhang, "the temple of the excellent horse", built in 15th century. We arrive into Paro and spend the rest of the day at leisure. One night in Khangkhu Resort with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 15 Fly to Kathmandu – 17th November

Early morning transfer to the airport for our flight to Kathmandu. Tour ends (B)

Cost £4,995.00 per person in a twin room (excluding international flights) Single supplement charge £495.00

Price includes –

- ▶ Tour accompanied from London by *Patrick Syder FRGS*
- ▶ Bhutanese guide for the duration of the tour
- ▶ All transportation by a/c bus
- ▶ International Druk Air return flights from Kathmandu to Paro
- ▶ Internal Druk Air flight (Paro to Bumthang)
- ▶ Full sightseeing programme including entrance fees
- ▶ Comfortable three star standard category tourist hotels
- ▶ Kathmandu transit hotel on B+B basis
- ▶ All meals in hotel or local restaurants
- ▶ All airport transfers
- ▶ Bottled water daily
- ▶ Porter, hotel and restaurant staff gratuities
- ▶ Royalty and Tourism Development Fund Taxes

Please note tour involves some long drives and reasonably high altitudes

PLEASE NOTE – personal travel insurance, visa fees, alcoholic drinks, guide and driver gratuities, international flights to Kathmandu are not included in the land tour cost



Tiger's Nest Monastery, Paro
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