



Trip Itinerary

HIGHLIGHTS

- Spectacular mountain trek through unspoilt wilderness in the remote Lunana region
- Spend the night at Gangkar Puensum Base Camp
- Be immersed in the ancient culture of Thimphu, Bumthang and Paro

DETAILED ITINERARY:

DAY 1: ARRIVE PARO AIRPORT; TRANSFER TO THIMPHU

Elevation: 2250m to 2350m

On a clear day, the flight into Paro is one of the most amazing mountain flights. Everest, Kanchenjunga and Makalu can all be seen, along with the Bhutanese peaks of Chomolhari, Jichu Drake and Tsering Chang. You will be met at the airport and transferred to Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan, which will take around 2 hours. On arrival in Thimphu, if time permits, we will visit the King's Memorial Chorten. The chorten was planned by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, but was only completed after his death so now serves as his memorial. An important religious site and the focus of daily worship, people will circumambulate the chorten throughout the day, reciting prayers and whirling the red prayer wheels.

Back at the hotel your Lead Guide will hold a pre-trek briefing to make sure you are prepared for your trek.

DAY 2: TOUR OF THIMPHU, DRIVE TO PUNAKHA

Elevation: 2350m to 3088m to 1600m

This morning you will continue with your tour of Thimphu. The National Library houses a collection of ancient Buddhist manuscripts and texts dating back over hundreds of years, as well as modern academic books about Himalayan religion and culture. The Institute for Zorig Chusum is an Arts and Crafts School where students learn the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. The Textile Museum is the place to learn about Bhutan's history of weaving, from the techniques used by local people to the wedding clothes worn by the king. Simply Bhutan is a living museum that introduces many aspects of Bhutanese traditional life. The project aims to preserve and promote culture, and provides job opportunities and training to young people. (Please be aware that not all sites may be open on the day you are due to visit Thimphu. The National Library and the Institute for Zorig Chusum are both closed on weekends and government holidays. The Textile Museum is closed on Sundays and government holidays.) You finish with a visit to the Trashichhoe Dzong – The Fortress of the Glorious Religion – the seat of government and religion which is home to the monarch's throne room. Originally built in 1641, the Dzong was rebuilt in the 1960s using traditional Bhutanese methods.



After lunch, you will be driven from Thimphu to Punakha, which takes around 3 hours. The road takes you up to the Dochu-La Pass on a series of switchbacks. The highest point on the road, 3088m, is marked by a chorten, mani wall and many prayer flags. The view from here is magnificent and the panorama includes the towering peaks of Masagang (7,158m), Tsendagang (6,960m), Terigang (7,060m), Jejegangphugang (7,158m), Kangphugang (7,170m), Zongphugang (7,060m), and Gangkar Puensum (7,570m). The road from the pass drops down into the Punakha valley and on to the town of Punakha where you will stay in a hotel.

DAY 3: TOUR OF PUNAKHA DZONG, DRIVE TO GASA

Elevation: 1600m to 2570m

This morning you will visit the Punakha Dzong, which sits at the junction of the Mo Chhu and Pho Chhu rivers and is now the administrative and religious centre of the region. Built in 1637, the dzong has been damaged by four fires and an earthquake but has now been fully restored. After lunch you will follow the Mo Chhu river as you are driven to the village of Gasa Tshachu, the starting point of your trek. The village is famous for the healing waters of its hot springs. You will camp here, ready to start trekking in the morning.

DAY 4: GASA TO CHAMSA

Elevation: 2570m to 2900m, Distance: 10 km, Time: 3-5 hours

Our trek begins with a steep climb through bamboo, rhododendron, juniper and fir forests. We then descend for about half an hour to our forest camp at Chamsa.

DAY 5: CHAMSA TO LAYA

Elevation: 2900m to 3840m, Distance: 20 km, Time: 7-8 hours

The trail continues to descend to the Mo Chhu river, where you will have lunch on the riverbank. It is then a gradual climb past an army camp to your campsite at Laya, one of the highest villages in Bhutan. The people of Laya are very friendly and will happily share with you their distinctive customs, dialect and traditional dress.

DAY 6: LAYA TO RHODOPHU

Elevation: 3840m to 4350m, Distance: 19 km, Time: 8-9 hours

You will re-trace your steps from Laya, passing the army camp back to the river which you will continue to follow. After lunch, the trail continues to ascend, passing through rhododendron forests until you will finally arrive at a hanging valley where yaks may be grazing. This will be our campsite for the night.

DAY 7: ACCLIMATISATION DAY IN RHODOPHU

Elevation: 4350m

You will spend a day in Rhodophu in preparation for the next stage of the trek where you climb above 5000m. You will take a short hike to a higher altitude to help your acclimatisation, following the 'walk high, sleep low' principle. There will also be time to rest so that you are ready to tackle the high mountain passes over the next few days.



DAY 8: RHODOPHU TO NARETHANG

Elevation: 4350m to 4900m, Distance: 17 km, Time: 5-7 hours

Your ascent begins with a climb up to the Tsimola La Pass (4700m). From the pass there are stunning views across the Lunana region to the peaks of Jichu Drake and Chomolhari. The trail continues to ascend as you trek to your next campsite at Narethang at 4900m. Tomorrow you will head to the Ganglakarchung La Pass, the highest point on the trek so far at 5100m.

DAY 9: NARETHANG TO TARINA VIA GANGLAKARCHUNG LA PASS

Elevation: 4900m to 5100m to 3980m, Distance: 18 km, Time: 5-7 hours

The day begins with a fairly level trek before the climb up to Ganglakarchung La Pass. The trail here must be one of the most stunning mountain viewpoints in Bhutan, with a whole range of 7000m mountains spread out ahead of you, including Masagang and Tsendegang. From the pass, it is a long descent into the Tarina valley, where the lower altitude will be appreciated.

DAY 10: TARINA TO WOCHÉ

Elevation: 3980m to 3800m, Distance: 17km, Time: 6-7 hours

The trail follows the upper reaches of the Pho Chhu river, descending through coniferous forests. A final climb over a ridge and you will descend into Woché, the first village you will have come to since Laya.

DAY 11: WOCHÉ TO LHEDI VIA KECHE LA PASS

Elevation: 3800m to 4480m to 3650m, Distance: 17km, Time: 6-7 hours

This morning begins with a trek through fir and juniper forests, and later through rhododendrons. You will climb up to 4480m to the Keché La Pass, and once again will break to enjoy the spectacular mountains around you. You will descend from the pass to a river which is one of the main tributaries of the Pho Chhu river. The trail follows this river upstream to the village of Lhedi where you will camp for the night.

DAY 12: LHEDI TO THANZA

Elevation: 3650m to 4000m, Distance: 17km, Time: 7-8 hours

You continue to follow the river upstream, ascending gradually to the village of Choejong, the largest in Lunana, where you will break for lunch. You will have the opportunity to visit the village temple before continuing with your trek. The trail takes you back to the river again, which you will cross on a suspension bridge before continuing to the next campsite at Thanza.

DAY 13: ACCLIMATISATION IN THANZA

Elevation: 4000m

A welcome day of rest before you head back up above 5000m. Thanza is the second largest village in Lunana so you can get out and explore, or just relax with a book and catch up on some washing. If you feel energetic and can manage a small climb, you can hike onto the ridge behind the village for more stunning mountain views.



DAY 14: THANZA TO TSHORIM

Elevation: 4000m to 5125m, Distance: 19km, Time: 8-9 hours

Today's trek begins with a climb onto the ridge, with great views of Table Mountain and the Thanza valley. Crossing the ridge you enter a smaller valley where you follow a small river upstream. After lunch you will climb out of the valley and continue across some smaller ridges. The campsite for tonight is at Tshorim at 5125m.

DAY 15: TSHORIM TO GANGKAR PUENSUM BASE CAMP VIA GUPHO LA PASS

Elevation: 5125m to 5230m to 4970m, Distance: 16km, Time: 6-7 hours

The trek to Gangkar Puensum Base Camp is a highlight of the trip. You begin with a short climb to Tshorim Lake, from where you can enjoy views of the Guphola ranges. A further short climb will take you onto the Gupho La Pass at 5230m. You descend from the pass along a ridge, with a great view of Gangkar Puensum, and down into base camp where the camp will be set up by the Sha Chhu river. If you wish, you can take a detour before arriving at base camp to climb a pyramid-shaped peak for more views of Bhutan's tallest mountain.

DAY 16: GANGKAR PUENSUM BASE CAMP TO GESHE WOMA

Elevation: 4970m to 4200m, Distance: 14km, Time: 6-7 hours

You leave camp following the Sha Chhu and descend gradually to your next campsite at Geshe Woma.

DAY 17: GESHE WOMA TO WARATHANG VIA SAKA LA PASS

Elevation: 4200m to 4800m to 4000m, Distance: 18km, Time: 8-9 hours

You continue to follow the Sha Chhu river for 2-3 hours before you start to ascend to Saka La. After taking a break for lunch at a yak herder's camp, you make the final ascent to Saka La Pass (4800m). You can appreciate the amazing views as you descend from the pass to a plateau with two lakes. There is then another short ascent to cross the second pass, Warathang La Pass, before a final descent to the campsite at Warathang.

DAY 18: WARATHANG TO DUR TSHACHU VIA ULI LA PASS

Elevation: 4000m to 4400m to 3950m, Distance: 14km, Time: 5-6 hours

It takes just under an hour to climb up to Uli La Pass at 4400m. You then descend through juniper, rhododendron and conifer forests to reach the river. Having crossed the river, there is a short climb to reach Dur Tshachu. Legend has it that in the 8th century, Guru Padsambhava bathed in the hot springs here.

DAY 19: DUR TSHACHU TO TSHOCHENCHEN VIA JULE LA PASS

Elevation: 3950m to 4700m to 3850m, Distance: 16km, Time: 8-9 hours

Today begins with a long, steady climb, but the views of the mountains of Lunana are worth the effort. The first pass you cross is the Gokthong La Pass at 4650m. From here you descend around 400m to where several glacial lakes are surrounded by pastures of grazing yaks. The second ascent is the Jule La Pass at 4700m, followed by the final descent to Tshochenchen.

DAY 20: TSHOCHENCHEN TO GORSUM

Elevation: 3850m to 3190m, Distance: 27km, Time: 9-10 hours

From Tshochenchen the trail leads downhill through spruce, cypress and juniper forests, following the course of the Yoleng Chhu river. A final short climb and you will arrive at the campsite at Gorsum.



DAY 21: GORSUM TO DUR, DRIVE TO BUMTHANG

Elevation: 3190m to 2650m, Trekking distance: 18km, Trekking time: 6 hours

The final day of the trek and pack ponies will replace yaks to carry the equipment. You need to start early to allow time to reach Bumthang before nightfall. The trail descends gradually with a few climbs as it follows the Chamkhar Chhu river. Once you arrive at Dur you have reached the end of your trek. Transport will collect you from Dur and take you to a lodge in Bumthang.

DAY 22: CULTURAL TOUR OF BUMTHANG

Elevation: 2650m

The Bumthang valley is the most historic region of Bhutan, based on the number of ancient temples and sacred sites. In the hills around the valley are numerous monasteries dedicated to Guru Padsambhava. It is also the ancestral home of Pema Lingpa, the Buddhist teacher from whom the present monarchy is descended. Among the sites you will visit is Jambey Lhakhang, the oldest lhakhang in Bhutan and one of 108 temples built by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century. You will also see Jakar Dzong, or the Castle of the White Bird, constructed as a fortress in 1549 to defend the eastern regions of Bhutan, it became the seat of the first king of Nepal.

DAY 23: FLY FROM BUMTHANG TO PARO

Elevation: 2650m to 2250m

This morning you will take a flight from Bumthang to Paro. On arrival you will have free time to relax at the hotel.

DAY 24: EXCURSION TO TAKTSHANG LAKHANG

Elevation: 2250m to 3110m to 2250m, Trekking time: 5 hours

This morning you will take a tour to Taktshang Lhakhang, more widely known as the Tiger's Nest Monastery, one of the most famous monasteries in the world. The Taktshang monastery nestles on a cliff top, around 3100m above sea level. The main temple, one of the holiest sites for the people of Bhutan, was built in 1692. The name 'Tiger's Nest' originates from the legend that in the 8th century, Guru Rinpoche, an Indian Buddhist master, came to the monastery to meditate on the back of a tigress. The monastery is now recognised as a sacred place of worship for Buddhists, and will be visited by Bhutanese people at least once in their life. The main building was badly damaged by fire in 1998, but restoration work has now been completed.

In the afternoon you will visit Kyichu Lhakhang. This temple marked the introduction of Buddhism to Bhutan in the 7th century and is another of the 108 temples built by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo in the Himalaya. From here you will be driven to the ruined fortress of Drukgyel Dzong. The Dzong was almost destroyed by fire in the 1950s, but in 2016 the Prime Minister announced a program to rebuild the Dzong and bring it back to its former glory. From the road to the Dzong there is a great view of the 7326m high Chomolhari, 'The Bride of Kangchenjunga'. You will return to your hotel in Paro for the night.

DAY 25: DEPART PARO AIRPORT

You will be met at the hotel and transferred to Paro Airport for your departing flight.



SUMMARY:

Bhutan, often referred to as 'Land of the Thunder Dragon' or 'the last Shangri La on earth', is situated in the lap of the Eastern Himalayas between India and the People's Republic of China. Covering an area of 18000 sq miles, the tiny Himalayan Kingdom is one of the most isolated nations in the world. Spectacular mountain terrain, varied flora and fauna, ancient Bhutan Buddhist monasteries, and the magnificent landscapes of Bhutan have made it an exemplary tourist destination. Bhutan is bestowed with rich biodiversity harboring around 300 medicinal herbs and 165 endangered species. Each part of Bhutan has its own historical, geographical, cultural, traditional and religious significance. With its beautiful and largely unspoiled Himalayan setting, its rich flora and fauna and its vibrant Buddhist culture, Bhutan really is an idyllic place to visit.

The Snowman Trek is an 18 day trek into the remote Lunana region. A combination of distance, high altitude, remoteness and unpredictable weather make this the most difficult trek in Bhutan. Make no mistake, this is an incredibly tough trek and you should only consider it if you have previous experience and a high level of fitness.

The Snowman trek is subject to closure because of snow, and the high mountain passes become impassable during the winter months. The recommended times to embark on the Snowman Trek are from March – May and from September – November.