



SHANGRILA EXPEDITIONS

presents

DRUK YUL

A Cultural Deep Dive Through the Land of the Thunder Dragon

13 DAYS · PARO TO BUMTHANG · WEST TO CENTRAL BHUTAN

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Some journeys skim the surface of a country. This one goes underneath it. Over 13 unhurried days, travel from Paro to Bumthang through the full sweep of western and central Bhutan — not as a checklist of sights, but as a slow accumulation of understanding. You will cross mountain passes strung with prayer flags, sit inside temples older than most nations, walk the cobbled lanes of clustered mountain villages, and stand before family heirlooms that have not left their original rooms in over a century. This is Bhutan as the Bhutanese know it: layered, unhurried, and deeply alive — culminating in the pilgrimage climb to the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery, perched impossibly above the Paro valley.



13 Days

Duration



3,100m

Max Elevation



Easy–Moderate

Difficulty



Mar–May, Sep–Nov

Best Seasons

YOUR 13-DAY JOURNEY

DAY

1

Arrival: Paro → Thimphu



Arrive at Paro International Airport — your first breath of Himalayan air in the kingdom of Gross National Happiness.



Warm welcome from your Shangrila Expeditions team with the traditional Tashi Khadar scarf ceremony.



Scenic 40-mile drive to Thimphu (1.5 hours) through forested mountain roads.



Lunch in Thimphu, Bhutan's unique capital — the only world capital without a traffic light.



Thimphu Valley familiarization tour — get your bearings in this intimate, unhurried city before the journey unfolds.



Welcome dinner at the hotel with your guide and fellow travellers.

DAY

2

Thimphu Full Day | Elevation: 2,350m



Memorial Chorten — the National Memorial Stupa, where devoted locals circumambulate in continuous prayer from dawn to dusk.



Simply Bhutan Living Museum — an immersive cultural space where traditional practices, architecture, and daily life are brought alive.



Arts and Craft School — watch master artisans perpetuate Bhutan's 13 living crafts: thangka painting, wood carving, bronze casting, weaving.



Lunch in town.



Takin Preserve Centre — encounter the national animal of Bhutan, found nowhere else on earth.



Traditional Handmade Paper Factory — lokta paper, used in sacred texts and royal documents, made by hand just as it has been for centuries.



Buddha Dordenma Viewpoint — panoramic bird's-eye view of the entire Thimphu Valley from the feet of one of the world's largest Buddha statues.



Weekend Farmers Market (Sat/Sun) — organic red rice, dried chili, yak cheese, honey, and local handmade goods from surrounding valleys.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY

3

Thimphu → Punakha via Dochula Pass



Drive to Punakha (77 km, 3 hours) over the iconic Dochula Pass at 3,150m — the gateway between the western valleys.



Dochula Pass: 108 memorial stupas crown this ridge, and on clear days the full panorama of the greater Himalayas stretches before you in all its majesty.



Short walks along the highway to stretch your legs and breathe in the rhododendron-laced mountain air.



Lunch at Punakha.



Punakha Dzong — perhaps the most beautiful fortress in Bhutan, positioned at the confluence of the Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers. Site of the historic 2011 royal wedding.



Evening hike to Chimi Lhakhang, the beloved Fertility Temple (1 hour round trip) — a gentle walk through rice paddies to a hilltop shrine associated with the Divine Madman, Drukpa Kunley.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY

4

Punakha Valley Day | Elevation: 1,300m



Morning hike to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten (1.5 hours round trip) — a beautiful trail through terraced rice fields and subtropical forest rewarded by sweeping valley views.



Rafting or kayaking on the Mo Chhu river — approximately one hour of gentle white-water adventure through the lush Punakha Valley (optional).



Lunch in town.



Sangchhen Dorji Lhundrup Nunnery — a stunning recently built nunnery on a hill above Punakha, housing remarkable bronze statues and offering sweeping views.



Talo Monastery — a remote, quietly spectacular monastery above the valley, associated with the Zhabdrung lineage.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY

5

Punakha → Trongsa | Elevation: 1,700m



Full driving day to Trongsa (88 miles, 6 hours) — one of Bhutan's great cross-country journeys through changing landscapes and altitudes.



The road twists and climbs to Pelela Pass at 3,410m — stop to admire the high alpine meadows and the distant outline of Black Mountain National Park.



Short walks along the highway to stretch your legs and absorb the valley panoramas that open at every turn.



Lunch at Chazam.



Trongsa Dzong — the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal dynasty and the largest Dzong in the kingdom. Its towers and courtyards cascade down the valley ridge in a breathtaking display of medieval architecture.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY

6

Trongsa → Jakar (Bumthang)



Tower of Trongsa Museum — a remarkable exhibition on the royal history of Bhutan housed in the fortress watchtower above the Dzong.



Drive to Jakar (42 miles, 2.5 hours) over Yotongla Pass (3,420m) into the beautiful Chumey Valley.



Stop at the Ya-Thra Weaving Centre — Bhutan's distinctive woollen textile made from sheep and yak wool, woven in bold geometric patterns unique to this region.



Lunch in Jakar town.



Arrive in Bumthang — Bhutan's cultural heartland, a broad valley of apple orchards, pine forests, and some of the kingdom's oldest temples.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY

7

Bumthang Valley Tour | Elevation: 2,900m



Jambay Lhakhang — one of Bhutan's oldest temples, founded in 659 AD by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo in a single night to pin down a supine demoness.



Kurje Lhakhang (746 AD) — the temple where Guru Rinpoche left the imprint of his body on the rock face after a legendary meditation. One of the holiest sites in Bhutan.



Hike to Tamshing Lhakhang — a pleasant walk across the Chamkha river to a temple built by the treasure revealer Terton Pema Lingpa in 1501, containing original murals of great antiquity.



Swiss Farm visit — the unlikely but beloved legacy of a Swiss development project: organic cheese, butter, and apple-based products produced here since the 1970s.



Lunch in town.



Jakar Dzong — the 'Castle of the White Bird', the administrative and spiritual centre of Bumthang.



Wangdichholing Palace — the 1837 royal palace, the first of its kind built on flat ground rather than a clifftop, now in atmospheric ruin.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY

8

Tang Valley — Sacred Lake & Heritage Manor



Drive deeper into Bumthang's remote Tang Valley (about an hour from Jakar) — the least commercial and most spiritually storied of the district's four valleys.



Visit Membartsho, the sacred 'Burning Lake' on the Tang Chhu river — where 15th-century treasure-revealer Pema Lingpa dove into the gorge holding a lit butter lamp before a skeptical crowd, and resurfaced with hidden relics and the flame still burning.



Continue to Ogyen Choling Palace Museum — a lived-in ancestral manor tracing its spiritual roots to the 14th-century master Longchen Rabjam. Rebuilt after the 1897 earthquake, it remains privately owned by the same family and displays original kitchen tools, weaving looms, and shrine rooms exactly as they were used across generations.



Lunch in the valley amid the quiet, terraced beauty of Tang.



On the return journey, stop at the Red Panda Brewery on the banks of the Chamkhar Chhu — Bhutan's first craft brewery, founded by a Swiss settler, producing small-batch unfiltered wheat beer alongside Bumthang's beloved farmhouse cheese.



Evening at leisure in Jakar — a quiet close to a day spent far from the usual tourist trail.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY

9

Jakar → Gangtey | Elevation: 2,900m



Drive to Gangtey / Phobjikha Valley (117 miles, 6 hours) — a long but rewarding journey back through the mountain passes and into one of Bhutan's most celebrated valleys.



Lunch en route, then diverge into the beautiful Phobjikha Valley — a rare glacial bowl carpeted with dwarf bamboo, rhododendron, and the wintering grounds of the endangered Black-necked Crane.



Gangtey Monastery (Gantey Gonpa) — the only Nyingmapa monastery in western Bhutan, perched above the valley and headed by the 9th reincarnation of Pema Lingpa. An active, atmospheric place of practice.



Nature Trail hike (1.5 hours at a leisurely pace) — a gorgeous loop through the valley floor, past farmhouses, streams, and open meadows.



Black-necked Crane Information Centre — learn about the migratory cranes that fly from the Tibetan Plateau each winter to roost in this valley, celebrated in Bhutanese culture and mythology.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY 10

Gangtey → Paro (The Long Road Back)



Return drive to Paro (120 miles, 7 hours) — the long journey back is part of the experience, revealing Bhutan's scale and variety.



Lunch at Dochula Pass — the 108 stupas and Himalayan panorama now a familiar and welcome landmark.



Arrive in Paro as the valley glows in the late afternoon light. Check into hotel and rest.



Dinner at the hotel.

DAY 11

Paro Valley Full Day | Elevation: 2,350m



Kyichu Lhakhang — one of the 108 temples built simultaneously across the Himalayas in 659 AD, this is among the most sacred and serene in Bhutan.



National Museum of Bhutan (Ta Dzong) — the watchtower-turned-museum with extraordinary collections of thangkas, armoury, textiles, and natural history.



Dungtse Lhakhang — a 15th-century chorten-style temple built to subdue a demoness said to haunt the valley.



Lunch in Paro town.



Hike to Dzongdrakha Temple — a lesser-visited cliff-face monastery offering superb views over the Paro Valley.



Witness Bhutan's national sport of archery — a colourful, competitive, and wildly entertaining spectacle at a local ground.



Visit a typical Bhutanese farmhouse for an authentic glimpse of rural life, traditional architecture, and warm local hospitality.



Traditional hot stone bath (optional) — river stones heated in fire then submerged in a wooden tub with local herbs: Bhutan's ancient answer to the day spa.



Farewell farmhouse dinner with authentic Bhutanese cuisine — ema datshi, red rice, buckwheat pancakes, and butter tea.

DAY 12

Tiger's Nest — The Summit of the Journey | Elevation: 3,100m



Early breakfast, then drive to the Paro Valley trailhead for the culminating hike of the entire journey.



Horse ride available for the lower section on advance booking.



Begin the ascent to Paro Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) — the trail climbs through blue pine and juniper forest past ancient meditation caves and fluttering strings of prayer flags.



Arrive at Tiger's Nest (3,100m): this impossible cliff-face monastery is where Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a tigress and meditated for three months in the 8th century. One of the most sacred sites in the Vajrayana Buddhist world.



Enter the inner sanctuaries — quiet, candlelit, and deeply moving — for a moment of meditation or silent reflection.



Lunch at the hillside cafeteria with the monastery directly across the gorge.



Afternoon visit to Kyichu Lhakhang on the descent — a gentle close to a profound day.



Farewell dinner at the hotel with a traditional cultural show — masked dance, folk songs, and the warmth of Bhutan at its most celebratory.

DAY

13

Departure — Tashi Delek



Final morning at leisure in Paro — a last walk, a final cup of butter tea, a moment in the mountain air.



Paro Airport features curated boutiques with artisanal Bhutanese goods, hand-woven textiles, incense, and specialty products — perfect for last-minute gifts.



Transfer to Paro International Airport for your departure flight, carrying home the colour, texture, and quiet wisdom of a kingdom you have now come to know deeply.



Tashi Delek! — May good fortune follow you. The kingdom looks forward to welcoming you back.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN YOUR PACKAGE



Accommodation in TCB-rated hotels, twin-bed / double-occupancy



Private ground transportation with professional driver



Expert English-speaking Shangrila guide throughout



Farewell cultural show and Ogyen Choling Museum entry



All meals (breakfast, lunch & dinner) throughout



All monument and museum entrance fees



Bhutan visa processing and Sustainable Development Fee (SDF)



Drinking water and welcome Tashi Khadar scarf ceremony

WHY TRAVEL WITH SHANGRILA EXPEDITIONS?



We don't just arrange tours — we create transformative experiences rooted in Bhutan's living culture, ancient wisdom, and extraordinary landscapes. As a registered Bhutan tour operator, our on-the-ground team and long-standing relationships with local communities ensure you travel with authenticity, depth, and ease.



✓ **Private access to sites most tourists never reach**

✓ **Bhutan-based expertise and deep local relationships**

✓ **Access beyond the tourist trail — farmhouses, monasteries**

✓ **End-to-end service from visa processing to farewell**

✓ Guides who explain ritual, symbolism, and context

✓ Bhutan's High Value, Low Impact philosophy at every step

SHANGRILA EXPEDITIONS · BHUTAN'S GATEWAY TO GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

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Tour prices quoted in USD per person. Rates vary by season. Contact us for a personalized quote.