



PCC: Treasures of Bhutan

April 4 – 13, 2019

10 Days / 9 Nights

April 4

Arrival / Bangkok

Welcome to Bangkok! Upon arrival, transfer to your airport hotel. Evening at leisure and overnight.

April 5

Bangkok - Thimphu

Today, fly from Bangkok - Paro. On a clear day, the flight is one of the most spectacular of all mountain flights. You will see major Himalayan peaks such as Everest, Kanchenjunga and Makalu, and on the final approach to Paro, Bhutan's own snowy peaks of Chomolhari, Jichu Drake, and Tserimgang.

Upon arrival in Paro, meet our representative and drive to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. En-route stop at Chuzom, the confluence of Thimphu and Paro rivers. Three different styles of stupas adorn this confluence - Tibetan, Nepalese, and Bhutanese. Shortly before reaching Chuzom, you will see Tschogang Lhakhang, the *Temple of the Excellent Horse*. It is a private temple built in the 15th century as the result of visitation from Balaha, the excellent horse and a manifestation of Chenrezig, the compassionate Buddha. Overnight in Thimphu.

April 6

Thimphu

After breakfast, visit the following: The National Library, with its extensive collection of priceless Buddhist manuscripts; the Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as the Painting School) where students undergo a six-year training course in Bhutan's 13 traditional arts and crafts; and the National Institute of Traditional Medicine where Bhutan's famed traditional herbal medicines are compounded and dispensed. Later, visit the Memorial Chorten, continuously circumambulated by people murmuring mantras and spinning the prayer wheels.

Later, explore *Simply Bhutan*, an exclusive project under the Bhutan Youth Development Fund (YDF). It is a living museum and studio encapsulating the cultural heritage of the Bhutanese people. A distinctive feature of *Simply Bhutan* is that it is fully operated by young people and job seekers who receive on the job training in basic business and management skills, customer care, and other spheres of life. The fund generated through *Simply Bhutan* is utilized to run many of the youth development programs for vulnerable and disadvantaged youth under YDF.





Evening at leisure and overnight in Thimphu.

April 7

Thimphu - Gangtey / 5 hours

After breakfast, enjoy a dramatic drive over the high mountain pass of Dochu La (3,080m) and on to the Phobjikha Valley passing through dense forests. The journey continues over the 3,050m mountain pass where on a clear day, the towering Himalayan peaks are clearly visible. The highway follows the scenic Dang Chhu before climbing through forests of bamboo and oak.

In the afternoon take a walk around Gangtey Village and visit Gangtey Gumpa, the only Nyingmapa monastery in the region. The village of Phobjikha neighbors the monastery on the valley floor. The quiet, remote valley is the winter home of black necked cranes which migrate from the arid plains of Tibet in the north. Explore Gangtey Village and Phobjikha Valley. Evening at leisure and overnight.

April 8

Gangtey

After breakfast, explore Gangtey (Phobjikha Valley) leisurely on foot. Walk to Kilkhorhang located between the upper and lower valleys of Phobjikha and extends from Kilkhorhang on the eastern side and crosses the main river to the other side of the valley.

From the small hilltop overlooking Gangtey Goemba, head downhill through flower meadows to Semchubara Village and from here through beautiful forests and into the open valley.

Late evening walk to nearby village for a traditional farm house excursion. A leisurely walk through the village will give you rare glimpses into the daily life and lifestyle of the villagers. Bhutanese farm houses are very colorful, decorative, and traditionally built without the use of nail. The majority of the population of Bhutan continues to live as it has for centuries – in small isolated farms and hamlets, surrounded by terraced fields of rice, maize and buckwheat. Overnight in Gangtey.

April 9

Gangtey - Punakha / 3 hours

In the morning, drive to Punakha. En-route take a short excursion to Chimi Lakhang: The Chimi Lakhang, situated on a hillock in the center of the valley, is known as the temple of fertility. It is widely believed that couples who do not have children are blessed with fertility after a temple prayer.





Punakha Valley is famous for rice farming where both red and white rice are grown along the river valleys of Pho and Mo Chhu, two of the most prominent rivers in Bhutan. 'Ritsha' meaning 'at the base of a hill' is a typical village in Punakha. The village houses are made of pounded mud with stone foundations. The gardens also usually have fruit bearing plants like oranges and papaya among the organic vegetables. In the recent years, the farming work is mechanized and power-tillers instead of bullocks are used to plough the fields and villagers have become relatively prosperous.

Your evening can be spent exploring Punakha Village on the riverbank where the villagers may invite you for yak-butter tea or chili pancakes. Overnight.

April 10

Punakha

After breakfast, hike through fields of chilies, cabbages, and rice along the banks of the Mo Chhu to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten, a stunning monument recently built by the Queens and consecrated in 1999.

Afternoon visit to Sang chhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang nunnery: Perched on a ridge amid pine trees and overlooking valleys of Punakha and Wangduephodrang gleams the magnificent structures of Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang (Temple). The temple houses a 14-foot main bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara (Chenrigzigchagtongchentong). Other statues include those of Guru Padmasambawa, Gautama Buddha, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, Tsela Namsum, the 21 Taras and Tsepamay (Buddha of longevity). The Avalokiteshvara statue, one of the biggest in the country, was the handiwork of entirely local Bhutanese artisans. The temple complex also houses a permanent higher learning and meditation center for nuns where, apart from religious trainings, it provides training such as tailoring, embroidery, statue making, and thangka painting.

Overnight in Punakha.

April 11

Punakha - Paro / 3 hours

After breakfast, drive to Paro. En-route visit Simtokha Dzong, the oldest fortress of the country built in 1627 which now houses the School for Buddhist studies. Upon arrival in Paro, check into the hotel.

Visit Ta Dzong, originally built as a watchtower, which now houses the National Museum. The extensive collection includes antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons, armor, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artifacts.





Then walk down the trail to visit Rinpung Dzong, *fortress of the heap of jewels*, which has a long and fascinating history. Along the wooden galleries lining the inner courtyard are fine wall paintings illustrating Buddhist lore such as four friends, the old man of long life, the wheel of life, scenes from the life of Milarepa, Mount. Sumeru and other cosmic Mandala. Overnight in Paro.

April 12

Paro

In the morning, hike to Taktsang Monastery. Taktsang Monastery is also known as Tiger’s Nest. It is believed that Guru Rinpoche, founding father of the Bhutanese form of Mahayana Buddhism, arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery. The main structure was severely damaged by fire in 1998, but after many years of painstaking restoration work, the complex has now been fully restored to its former glory. Trek back to the vehicle and drive to Paro.

Optional evening hot stone bath, historically believed to have medicinal benefits in healing joint pain, hypertension, arthritis, and stomach disorders. Overnight in Paro.

April 13

Departure

Today, transfer to the airport for your onward flight to Bangkok. Bon Voyage!

Please note: Some of the sights/itinerary may change due to road conditions, weather, and special events. We maintain the rights to alter the itinerary since tours are made in advance and unforeseen circumstances may arise. Itinerary revisions are made to improve your overall travel experience in Bhutan.

The tourism infrastructure of Bhutan continues to develop. Therefore, the accommodation and transport standards may be different than what you are accustomed to when traveling to other destinations. Hotels are standard and comfortable with basic amenities. Flights may be delayed and ground transportation may be limited, thus causing adjustments to your scheduled itinerary. To avoid disappointment, we ask you to consider these factors when traveling to Bhutan.

Proposed Accommodations

Bangkok	BKK Best Western Amaranth	01
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Thimphu	Hotel Arya or Similar	02
Gangtey	Dewachen Hotel or Similar	02
Punakha	RPKO Green Resort or Similar	02
Paro	Naksel Boutique or Similar	02

Inclusions

- 9 nights of accommodations, double occupancy
- Bhutan: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily
- Economy airfare from Bangkok – Paro - Bangkok
- Private vehicle and driver
- Comprehensive touring as listed in the itinerary, including private English-speaking escort and entrance fees to the monuments
- Airport transfers with representative
- Bhutan Visa Fee
- Bhutan Government Royalty Tax
- Road/Interstate taxes, fuel surcharges, and parking fees
- Taxes, fees, and government surcharges

Exclusions

- International airfare to/from Bangkok
- Any items of a personal nature
- Gratuities
- Travel Insurance

Cost

6 – 9 guests: \$5,010.00/person, based on double occupancy
Single Supplement: \$965.00

About Sodha Travel

Remember: Not all tour companies are created equal! What is the Sodha Travel difference?





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- A team of destination specialists that *exclusively* caters to Bhutan with insider access to unique experiences
- Extensive on-the-ground support in the destinations we serve, ensuring our clients have 24-hour access to our local representatives and emergency services
- Private guides and local, licensed historians
- An elite fleet of vehicles
- Our DMC awards include the following:
 - ❖ 6 years in succession in 1st Position and total 24 times winner of the India Ministry of Tourism’s “National Award for Excellence in Service”
 - ❖ PATA Gold Award
 - ❖ World Travel Awards – World’s Leading Destination Management Company
 - National Tourism Award for Responsible Tourism Project/Initiative - Empowerment of Women through Literacy India and Fair Trade

