



BHUTAN: LAND OF THE THUNDER DRAGON

Venture high in the eastern Himalayas to one of
the last untouched bastions of ancient
civilisation, Bhutan.

Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Indian Subcontinent, Bhutan



8 days from AU\$13,740 pp



Private

Journey Overview

Venture high in the eastern Himalayas to one of the last untouched bastions of ancient civilisation, Bhutan. A place where mountain legends, quiet spirituality and dramatic snow-capped vistas await at every turn. Step inside mountaintop monasteries and experience the wonders of Buddhist spirituality. Trek through emerald valleys surrounded by soaring peaks and glacial rivers. And explore the rich culture of the local community, unchanged for centuries. Welcome to the Land of the Thunder Dragon.

Journey Highlights

- Hike to the breathtaking Tiger's Nest Monastery
- Explore museums, chortens and markets in Bhutan's pretty capital, Thimphu
- Visit the Shrine of the Divine Madman in Punakha
- Cross the spectacular Dochu La Pass offering a panoramic view of Himalaya mountains
- Light 108 butter candles in one of the country's oldest temples
- Meet local families and Buddhist monks for an insight into their ancient culture



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Paro - Thimphu

Tashi Delek and welcome to the beautiful Kingdom of Bhutan. Receive a warm A&K welcome on arrival in Paro and continue overland to Thimphu via Simtokha Dzong, an atmospheric Buddhist fort and the gateway to Thimphu Valley. Transfer to your luxury hotel and enjoy the beautiful sights of Bhutan's petite and pretty capital, one of the highest in the world at an altitude of up to 2,648 metres. Later visit the Memorial Chorten, a large Tibetan-style Buddhist monastery designed to be the most visible religious structure in Thimphu.

Pemako Thimphu / Meals: LD

Day 2: Thimphu

Step inside an exquisite monastery to watch monks as they chant their daily prayers. Receive blessings from a monk and experience the wonders of Bhutan's spirituality lighting 108 butter lamps, a ceremony believed to awaken your spirit and focus your mind.

Delve into the country's past at the National Library with its small collection of precious texts, the Folk Heritage Museum which provides a glimpse into Bhutanese lifestyle and the National Institute of Traditional Medicine showcasing traditional systems of healing. Continue to the National Textile Museums and the Handicrafts Emporium to admire the art of weaving that has been carefully preserved for centuries in Bhutan. Finally, visit the Tashichho Dzong, an impressive monastery built without a single drawing or a single nail.

This evening is at leisure, and you may choose to attend a talk by a well-respected local person about Bhutan's history, politics and society to get an orientation on Bhutan or take your seat for a Bhutanese dinner with traditional dancing (additional charges).

Pemako Thimphu / Meals: BLD

Day 3: Thimphu - Punakha

Bid farewell to the capital and journey east over the spectacular Dochu La Pass. Breathe in enchanting views of Bhutan and the Himalaya mountains before continuing into the green vales of Punakha, an ancient capital. Stretch your legs on a short hike to Chimi Lhakhang, the temple of the Divine Madman, Bhutan's most unorthodox saint. See the stunning 17th century Punakha Dzong, also known as 'the palace of great happiness or bliss' and the second largest dzong in Bhutan.

Amankora, Punakha / Meals: BLD

Day 4: Punakha

Take a hike through pine forests to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, set on a beautiful ridge above the Punakha Valley, providing commanding views across the Mo Chhu and up towards the mountainous peaks of Gasa and beyond from the structure's rooftop. This fine example of Bhutanese architecture and artistic traditions was built by Bhutan's Queen Mother to remove negative forces and promote peace, stability and harmony in the changing world dominates the upper Punakha Valley.

Enjoy an afternoon at leisure. If you're feeling adventurous, take a rafting trip at Pho Chhu (additional charge).

Amankora, Punakha / Meals: BLD

Day 5: Punakha - Paro

Depart the green valley of Punakha for the overland trip to Paro. Begin with the impressive Paro Dzong, perhaps the finest in Bhutan. Cross a wooden bridge over the river and discover why it's known as the 'Fortress on a Heap of Jewels'. Continue to an ancient watchtower above the Paro Dzong and explore the National Museum. Marvel at the architecture of this unusual round building, shaped like a conch shell and discover treasure-filled rooms of art, bronze statues and paintings from different regions.

Later, enjoy Bhutanese hospitality on a visit to a local family's colourful farmhouse, sipping tea with the locals as you get a glimpse into their lives. Take part in the cherished ritual of hanging prayer flags to send Buddhist blessing through the winds at Kyichu Lhakhang. Built in the seventh century to subdue a demoness who prevented the spread of Buddhism it is one of Bhutan's oldest religious sites.

COMO Uma Paro / Meals: BLD

Day 6: Paro

Rise early for an unforgettable hike to Taktsang Monastery (The Tiger's Nest). Clinging to sheer granite cliffs high above the valley floor, this seemingly impregnable fortress is truly magnificent. Spend the day among the monks at this sacred pilgrimage site, where the great tantric mystic Guru Rinpoche is believed to have flown on the back of the tiger to bring the teachings of the Buddhist Dharma to Bhutan.

This evening, try your skills at Bhutan's national sport on the resort's archery field. Alternatively, you may choose to take a traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath for the perfect end to your day's adventures (additional cost).

COMO Uma Paro / Meals: BLD**Day 7: Paro - Haa Valley - Paro**

Head along the inspiring route to Chele La Pass and take in spectacular views of the sacred Jhomolhari and Jitchu Drake mountains. Continue over the pass into the Haa Valley, also known as "Hidden-Land Rice Valley". Perhaps the most picturesque area in Bhutan, this valley is home to minority villages with traditional animist beliefs.

Returning to your luxury accommodation in Paro, learn to cook traditional Bhutanese food from the hotel's executive chef. Using traditional utensils like the *sume*, designed to churn butter, and a *tshome*, similar to a mortar and pestle, uncover the secrets to the fermented yak cheese and chilli dish known as *ema datshi*, a yak milk yogurt called *dau*, Bhutanese buckwheat noodles and *momo* yak dumplings.

COMO Uma Paro / Meals: BLD**Day 8: Depart Paro**

Farewell this enchanting kingdom and transfer privately to the airport for your onward journey.

Meals: B

Map



Accommodation

Amankora, Punakha



Cross a suspension bridge over the Mo Chhu River to find luxury and serenity in Amankora, Punakha. One of Aman's five locations in the wonderful Kingdom of Bhutan (with sister resorts in Paro, Thimphu, Gangtey and Bumthang), the lodge marries the luxury and convenience of well-appointed private residences with an unparalleled window into the unique culture and impossibly spectacular Himalayan surroundings.

Designed by Kerry Hill, the Australian-born resort architect, the Amankora Punakha Lodge itself is a piece of art. The signature Amankora suites feature spacious and airy bedrooms and living rooms with king size beds, window seats and traditional wood burners, while every en suite bathroom has a large free-standing bathtub.

The restaurant is inside a beautiful traditional Bhutanese farmhouse, built some decades ago by a former Je Khenpo (chief abbot of Bhutan). Here, you can choose from an array of Bhutanese, Western and Indian dishes, which showcase local ingredients, whether yak meat, fresh honey or seasonal vegetables. Or perhaps indulge in an intimate dining experience within your room or another stunning setting.

Why we like it

- Within easy access of Bhutan's highlights

- Open-plan rooms with free-standing bathtubs and bukhari wood burners
- An array of Bhutanese, Western and India dishes served in the stunning restaurant
- Incorporates a traditional Bhutanese farmhouse built by a former chief abbot of Bhutan

COMO Uma Paro



COMO Uma Paro is an intimate luxury resort hidden away in a delightful and serene forest in the Paro Valley, within easy distance of the tiny kingdom's great cultural landmarks.

Blending local artisanship with COMO's contemporary style, the resort invites you to become immersed in the richly textured culture of Bhutan while enjoying the comforts of a COMO resort. Nine private cottage-sized villas are scattered throughout the resort, each built from handcrafted Bhutanese stone, timber and tiling. In addition, there are 20 excellently appointed rooms in the large main building.

The resort boasts the exceptional COMO Shambhala Retreat (including two traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath rooms, a gym and pool), as well as yoga sessions and an archery field showcasing Bhutan's national sport.

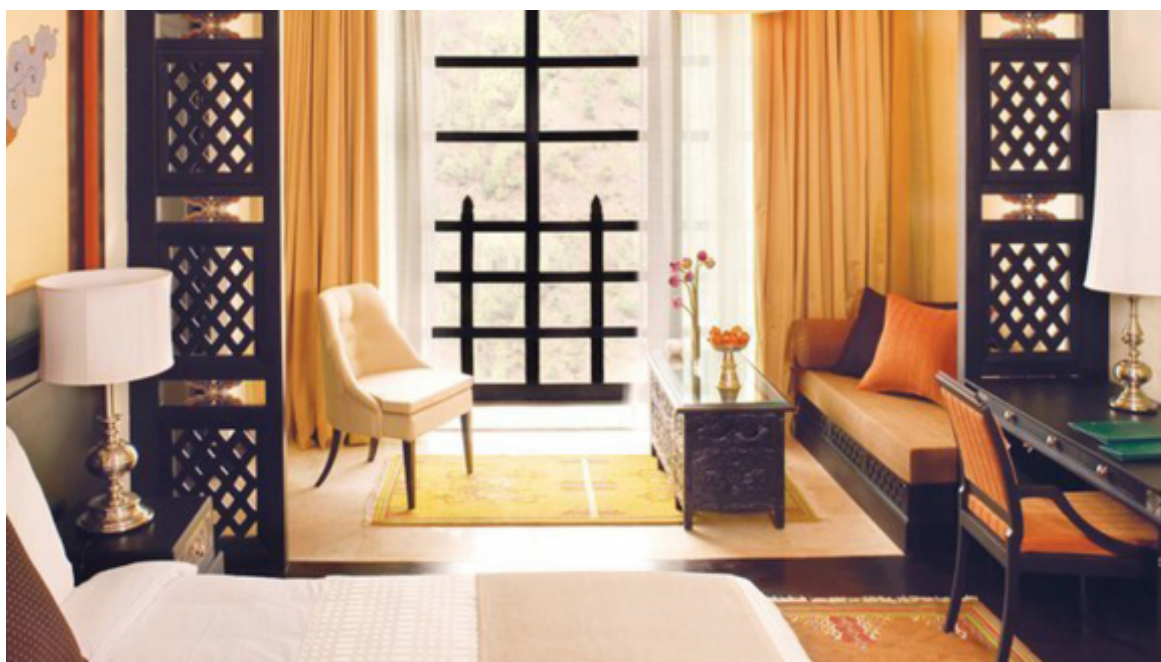
After a day's adventures, the menu at the yurt-shaped Bukhari restaurant won't disappoint with its full and delectable Indian menu, in addition to local Bhutanese cuisine. It's little wonder Bhutan's royal family regularly make this their Paro restaurant of choice. Much of their fresh produce comes from their own organic kitchen garden, which they maintain in partnership with local farmers from the Paro Valley. There's also the elegant Uma Bar for all-day dining that incorporates healthy COMO Shambhala cuisine designed to maximise energy and wellbeing.

Why we like it

- Set in a stunning serene forest in the Paro Valley
- Close to Bhutan's great landmarks, including Taktsang Monastery (The Tiger's Nest)
- The excellent Bukhari restaurant is frequented by Bhutan's royal family

- COMO Shambhala Retreat with two traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath room.

Pemako Thimphu



Set in the heart of the Thimphu Valley, the Pemako Thimphu, is a gateway to a land steeped in mythology and magic. The mountain kingdom of Bhutan remains one of the old world's last few strongholds as yet unspoilt by civilization. In the isolation of the Himalayan heights, Bhutan's ancient Mahayana Buddhism continues richly intact to this day, and permeates every aspect of Bhutanese life and art.

In keeping with the enchanting surroundings, the hotel is a blend of Bhutan's dzong architecture and modern design. The rooms are adorned with swirls of hand-painted murals of clouds – a recurring motif in Bhutanese art – and take in sweeping views of the surrounding mountains. Elegant, expansive and luxuriously appointed, the rooms pamper guests with the finest amenities. Suites, on the other hand, feature distinctive canopy beds, walk-in closets and home theatre systems. Natural lighting emphasizes large, well laid-out bathrooms featuring standalone Christina bathtubs.

Why we like it

- Located in the capital of Bhutan, the hotel is the perfect base from which to explore this intriguing city
- The spa offers holistic treatments and local Bhutanese hot stone therapies
- The hotel has a heated indoor swimming pool
- Other facilities include bars, lounges, cafes and a fitness centre. Meanwhile, the hotel offers an extensive range of activities and tours of the surrounding areas

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**Call Us Now on
1300 851 924
within Australia**

Melbourne Office:

T: +61 (0)3 9536 1800

F: +61 (0) 3 9536 1805

E: contact@abercrombiekent.com.au

Address

Level 26 (North Tower)

80 Collins St

Melbourne, VIC, 3000

International:

New Zealand Call: 0800 441 638

Asia Call: 800 4747 7700