



TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

ESSENTIAL NEPAL & BHUTAN

16 days

What's not included

- International flight to Nepal
- Meals not mentioned in itinerary
- Drinks
- Visa for Nepal
- Tipping
- Camera / video camera fees
- Personal items (laundry, telephone, etc.)
- Medical expenses
- Any services not mentioned in itinerary

All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.

Your Itinerary Explained

Date	Place visited	Meals
	<p>The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>The part of the day's text in italics (and comes after the three dashes "---") is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.</i></p>	<p>B: Breakfast</p> <p>L: Lunch</p> <p>D: Dinner</p>

Tour Itinerary

Day 1	Arrival	Meals
 <p>Patan Durbar Square</p>	<p>On arrival in Kathmandu, you will be met by a Travel the Unknown representative and transferred straight to Patan Durbar Square. Overnight in Patan Durbar Square.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>Patan Durbar Square is a marvel of Newar architecture and a UNESCO world heritage site. The Square floor is tiled with red bricks and there are a number of temples and idols in the area. The history of the Durbar Square is not clear. Although the Malla Kings of Lalitpur are given credit for establishing the royal square.</i></p> <p><i>Kathmandu is the capital of the ancient mountain kingdom of Nepal, which was only opened up to foreign visitors in the 1950s. It has the air of a medieval city with its labyrinth of narrow streets, wooden temples and beautifully decorated palaces. In the background, you can often hear the gentle sound of cymbals and smell the rich aromas of the markets.</i></p> <p><i>Overnight in Temple House, Patan Durbar Square</i></p>	N/A
 <p>Bhaktapur Durbar Square</p>	<p>After breakfast, you will have a tour of the ancient villages of Bungamati and Khokana. Later, you will explore Bhaktapur Durbar Square. Overnight in Bhaktapur.</p> <p>* Witness the Dashain festival (autumn tour)</p> <p>---</p>	B

***Bhaktapur** is one of the 3 royal cities in the Kathmandu Valley. It was tragically damaged in the 2015 earthquake, with temples destroyed, traditional buildings made uninhabitable and whole streets lost. However, there is still much to see in Bhaktapur, with elaborately carved temples, medieval squares, and winding narrow streets between red-brick houses showcasing the city's rich culture and history.*

***Bhaktapur Durbar Square** is located in the centre of Bhaktapur and was added to the list of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO in 1979. The Square is one of the most charming architectural showpieces of the Valley, highlighting some of the finest medieval arts of Nepal. The art Gallery of Bhaktapur Durbar Square contains ancient paintings belonging to the Hindu and Buddhist traditions of various periods and is open every day except Tuesday.*

Overnight in Hotel Heritage, Bhaktapur

Day 3	Bhaktapur - Panauti	Meals
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Panauti

After breakfast, you will be transferred to Panauti. In Panauti you will be staying in a community homestay, really giving you the chance to immerse yourself in Nepalese culture. During your stay with the host family, there will be many ways to involve yourself in their daily lives and participate in local events. Community homestays are also a great way to exchange your ideas and skills with local communities. Whilst staying at the homestays you can also volunteer to teach in one of the schools, assist with rebuilding classrooms damaged by the earthquake, or help in other ways by sharing your ideas about health, education and hygiene in the local community. Overnight in Panauti.

B L D

*Originally a small state given by King Bhupatindra Malla as a dowry to his sister before it was finally integrated into Nepal in the 13th century, the small town of **Panauti** is rich in history. One of the area's most important medieval sites, it sits at the sacred confluence of the Roshi Khola and Pungamati Khola, and showcases a variety of Buddhist and Hindu religious monuments.*

Overnight in Panauti Homestay, Panauti

Day 4	Panauti	Meals
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Panauti

Today you will have a full-day with your host families. This can be spent around the home, learning how to cook the local cuisine, or volunteering at a local school. Overnight in Panauti.

B L D

Overnight in Panauti Homestay, Panauti

Day 5

Panauti - Kathmandu - Paro - Thimphu

Meals



Thimphu

This morning you will be transferred to Kathmandu airport for your flight to Paro. On arrival in Paro, you will be met by a Travel the Unknown representative and transferred to Thimphu. On arrival in Thimphu check-in to your hotel, before an evening guided walk around Thimphu Main Street and market area. Overnight Thimphu.

B D

Thimphu is the capital of Bhutan and its governmental, religious and commercial centre. It is nestled in the Wang Chuu river valley and is abundant in natural splendour, wildlife and culture. Thimphu is a very unique city with an unusual mixture of modern developments alongside ancient traditions. With a population of about 100,000 people, it is perhaps the world's only capital city without traffic lights. In fact, there are no traffic lights in the whole of the country. Here, policemen stand in decorated pavilions in the main intersections and direct traffic using hand gestures in a conscious effort to save their culture from modern influences. Every building is still decorated with Dzong-style features and Buddhism influences every part of daily life. There is a variety of cafes, bars, nightclubs and restaurants, and Thimphu is one of the few places in Bhutan to have ATM machines. Altitude: 2,320m.

Overnight in Hotel Thimphu Tower, Thimphu

Day 6

Thimphu

Meals



Trashichhoe
Dzong

This morning you will have a sightseeing tour in Thimphu Valley including visits to The National Library, The Institute for Zorig Chusum, the Textile Museum and Simply Bhutan.

B L D

After lunch, you will be transferred to Pangri Zampa, a 16th-century monastery, and later transferred to Buddha Point (Kuensel Phodrang). Later you will visit Trashichhoe Dzong, an impressive fort and the summer residence of Chief Abbot and central monk body. Overnight in Thimphu.

*The **National Library** houses the largest published book in the world. Called 'Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Kingdom', it weights over 60kg and is 1.52m high and 2.13m wide. Its pages are turned only once per month. The library itself was opened in 1967 to collect and preserve ancient Dzongha and Tibetan texts. Some of the most significant document are well-labeled in English and there is even a colourful shrine inside the building.*

*The **Institute for Zorig Chusum**, commonly known as the Painting School, offers 4- and 6-year courses where students can learn the 13 traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts. Students start with woodwork, stonework and carving, then progress onto painting, sculpting, casting, wood-turning, blacksmith-y, ornament-making, bamboo work, paper-making, tailoring and weaving. Depending on the time you visit, you may even see some of the students selling their work outside and be astounded by their skills.*

***Trashichhoe Dzong** ('Fortress of the Glorious Religion') is the centre of government and religion, the site of the monarch's throne room and the seat of Je Khenpo or Chief Abbot. Built in 1641 by the political and religious unifier of Bhutan, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was reconstructed in 1960's in a traditional Bhutanese manner, without nails or architectural plans.*

Overnight in Hotel Thimphu Tower, Thimphu

Day 7	Thimphu - Gangtey	Meals
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Gangtey

This morning you will drive to Gangtey, en-route visiting the Dochla Pass (at an altitude of 3080m). On arrival in Gangtey, check-in to your hotel before an afternoon walk around Gangtey village and visit Gangtey Goempa, the only Nyingmapa monastery in this region. Overnight in Gangtey.

B L D

*The **Gangtey** valley is one of the most beautiful spots in Bhutan. Finding such a large flat valley without any trees after climbing through thick forest is extremely rare in Bhutan. Altitude: 3,000m.*

***Gangtey Goempa** is an important monastery of the Nyingmapa school of Buddhism, located in central Bhutan. The monastery is most famed for the annual arrival of black-necked-cranes, that visit central Bhutan to roost. The monastery's history traces to the early 17th century.*

Day 8	Gangtey - Bumthang	Meals
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The Trongsa Dzong

This morning you will drive to Bumthang crossing the Pele-la pass (at 3300m above sea level). You will stop off for lunch in Trongsa and visit Trongsa Dzong and Ta Dzong.

B L D

This afternoon you will continue your journey to Bumthang across the Yutong-la pass (at 3400m above sea level). Overnight in Bumthang.

***Ta Dzong** is located above the Trongsa Dzong, and a short, steep walk from the main Trongsa town. Ta Dzong, which means "watchtower", was built in the 17th century and was built to protect Trongsa from any external threats.*

***Trongsa** is situated on a steep ridge that drops off into the clouds on its south side. It offers spectacular views of the deep valleys surrounding it. The various hotels, guesthouses and restaurants all offer stunning views from their balconies. Trongsa Dzong is easily visible from anywhere in town and is always an impressive sight.*

*The **Trongsa Dzong** sits overlooking the Mangdechhu River. It was founded by Yingzin Ngagi Wangchuk, a descendant of Ngawang Chogyal and a revered follower of Kuenkhen Pema Karpo. In 1541, he meditated at the village of Yueli in Trongsa, a few kilometers away from the present Dzong. During the meditation, he saw a lit butter lamp below the Goenkhang ridge, which houses the guardian deities Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) and Yeshey Goenpo (Mahakali). Considering the place to be sacred, he built meditation quarters. Once during his meditation in the new quarter, the deity Palden Lhamo appeared and prophesied that this place would play an important role in spreading Buddhist teachings. After this incident, Yingzin Ngagi Wangchuk constructed a small temple and named it **Mondrupley**. Over the years, his disciples built many smaller meditation centers near the Mondrupley temple, which soon began to resemble a small village. The people of Yueli named this new village Trong-sar (new village).*

Located in central Bhutan, **Bumthang** is considered the spiritual heartland of Bhutan. This district is dotted with many temples and monasteries, among which are some of the oldest Buddhist temples and monasteries. This beautiful valley of buckwheat and apples has a mysterious history as an abode of gods and is one of the richest cultural places in the country.

Pele La Pass is the traditional boundary between the east and the west. The pass is marked by large white chorten prayer flags and there is an abrupt change in vegetation at this point, where mountain forest is replaced by dwarf bamboo. Altitude: 3,300m.

Overnight in Jakar Village Lodge, Bumthang

Day 9	Bumthang	Meals
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Ura

After breakfast, you will have an excursion to the Ura valley, as well as a chance to witness the Ura Yakchoed Festival. Overnight in Bumthang.

B L D

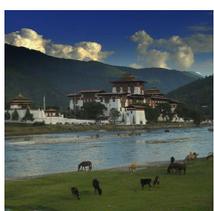
*Witness the Domkhar festival (Spring tour)

*Ura valley in Bumthang is known for the famous dance known as the **Ura Yakchoe**. The dance is performed during a festival that is held every May. During the festival, a sacred and important relic is put on display so that the people can receive blessings from it.*

***Ura** is one of the most interesting villages in Bhutan. There are about 40 closely packed houses along cobblestoned streets, and the main Ura Lhakhang dominates the town, giving it a medieval atmosphere. In colder weather, Ura women wear a sheepskin shawl that serves as both a blanket and a cushion.*

Overnight in Jakar Village Lodge, Bumthang

Day 10	Bumthang	Meals
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Bumthang

This morning you will have a tour of Bumthang Valley comprising of four valleys; Chumney, Choekhor, Tang and Ura (altitude varying from 2,600m to 4,000m). You will visit Kurje Lhakhang, the Jambey Lhakhang, Tamshing Lhakhang and Jakar Dzong.

B L D

This afternoon you will take a short hike to Lhodrak Kharchhu Monastery, before making your way back to Bumthang. Overnight in Bumthang.

Kurje Lhakhang: The 8th century king of Bumthang, Sendah Gyab, was cursed with illness by the guardian deity named Shelging Karpo. The king then invited Guru Rinpoche from Yanglayshey (meditation cave of the Guru) in Nepal to Bhutan and in 746 AD. Guru Rinpoche visited Bumthang, subdued the demons and restored the King's health. Guru Rinpoche meditated in a cave named Dragmar Dorji Tsegpa and his body imprints remained on the rocks, which is why the temple is named Kurje Lhakhang, meaning:- The Temple of Imprints. There are three main temples in Kurje. The oldest temple was constructed by Minjur Tenpa in 1652 on the site where Guru Rinpoche meditated. The second temple was founded by Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck in 1900 while serving as the 13th Trongsa Penlop. This temple is the most sacred as it was built in the place where Guru Rinpoche left his body imprint. The third temple was built in the 1990s. It was sponsored by the Queen Mother Ashi Kezang Choden Wangchuck.

Jambey Lhakhang: One of the oldest and most sacred temples in Bhutan. It is said to be one of the 108 temples built by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo in 659 AD in a single day, to pin down an ogress to the earth forever.

The **Tamshing Lhakhang** monastery is the seat of Lama Sungtrul Rinpoche, the current incarnation of Pema Lingpa (1450–1521), who built it in 1501. He was a famous saint, master of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and the discoverer of spiritual treasures. It contains sacred religious scripts and paintings, among which are the portraits of Pema Lingpa himself.

The **Jakar Dzong** was originally built in 1549 by Yongzin Ngagi Wangchuk, who came to spread the teachings of the Drukpa Kagyupa order in Bhutan. He saw a white bird perched on the construction site and considered it a good omen, naming the dzong to mean 'White Bird Fortress'.

The **Lhodrak Kharchhu Monastery** was founded by Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche in 1984 who was recognized at a very young age to be the reincarnation of a Tibetan lama whose spiritual lineage dates back to the nearest disciples of the great 9th century master. Since then, the monastery has developed considerably and increased by almost four hundred monks. The monastery has become part of an extensive effort to preserve and revitalize Tibetan culture. The monks' regular curriculum includes reading, grammar, poetry, 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, karika, the basics of contemplation and instruction on the different stages of tantra.

Overnight in Jakar Village Lodge, Bumthang

Day 11

Bumthang - Punakha

Meals



Punakha

After check-out, you will drive to Punakha, the old capital town of Bhutan. On arrival, you will check-in to your hotel, and the rest of the day will be at leisure. Overnight in Punakha.

The **Punakha valley** has a pleasant climate with warm winters and hot summers. Owing to the favourable climatic conditions, rice grows very well in this region and is the main cash crop cultivated here. Altitude: 1,300m.

B L D

Overnight in Drubchhu, Punakha

Day 12	Punakha	Meals
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Khamsum Yulley
Namgyal
Chorten

This morning you will have a visit to Punakha Dzong, before visiting Chimi Lhakhang. After lunch, you will have a short hike through fields of chillies, and rice along the banks of the Mo Chhu to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, a stunning monument built in 1999. Overnight in Punakha.

*The **Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten** was built on a ridge above Punakha valley and took around nine years to build. It is said that the Bhutanese craftsmen consulted Holy Scriptures to construct this 4 storey temple. The temple was built by Her Majesty, the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck.*

*The **Chimi Lhakhang** temple is commonly known as the Temple of Fertility. It sits on a hillock in the centre of the valley, a site that was blessed by the 'Divine Madman'. This is the maverick saint Drukpa Kuenleyis that was famously obsessed with his 'magic thunderbolt of wisdom'. Therefore it is not unusual to see phalluses (symbol of fertility) painted on the outside of houses! It is widely believed that if couples who do not have children pray at this temple, they are blessed with a child very soon. Besides its fertility blessings, the temple also works to fulfill other religious needs. The trail to the temple leads across rice fields through the tiny settlement of Pana, which means 'field'. A walk through this village will give you a rare glimpse into the daily life of the Bhutanese.*

*The majestic **Punakha Dzong**, known as the Palace of Great Happiness, used to serve as Bhutan's religious and administrative centre until the 1950s. The inside courtyards and religious statuary hint at a deep historical and spiritual tradition. It is quite large, measuring over 180m long by 70m wide and has a six-story, gold-domed tower. The dzong sits at the junction of the Pho chhu and Mo chhu rivers and was built in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, a Tibetan Buddhist lama. Arguably the most beautiful dzong in Bhutan, it was the second to be ever built in the country. Bhutan's most treasured possession, the Rangjung ('Self-Created') Kharsapani image of Chenresig is kept here, but is closed to the public.*

Overnight in Drubchhu, Punakha

B L D

Day 13	Punakha - Paro	Meals
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Simtokha Dzong

This morning you will drive to Paro, visiting Simtokha Dzong en-route. On arrival in Paro, check-in to your hotel. This afternoon you will visit Ta Dzong, and have a short walk down the trail to visit Rinpung Dzong. Overnight in Paro.

***Paro** is the second largest town in Bhutan although small in size and population. Its main street is lined with buildings richly decorated in traditional architecture that house a scattering of shops and restaurants. Paro is an ideal base for exploring the surrounding attractions, such as Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest). After Bumthang, the valley is amongst the most beautiful in Bhutan. Altitude: 2,280m.*

B L D

The **Ta Dzong** was originally built to be a watchtower, but it now houses the National Museum. Its extensive collection includes antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons, armour, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artifacts.

The **Rinpung Dzong**, which means 'Fortress of the Heap of Jewels', has a long and fascinating history. Fine wall paintings line the wooden galleries of the inner courtyard, illustrating Buddhist traditions and knowledge.

Overlooking Thimphu Valley, the **Simtokha Dzong** is the oldest dzong to have survived a series of attacks as a completed structure. According to legend, the building was created to subdue a demon that was harassing travelers to the area. When the evil spirit vanished into a nearby rock, the dzong was built upon it to enclose and guard the demon. As a result, the dzong gained its name, literally translating to "atop a demon".

Overnight in Village Lodge, Paro

Day 14

Paro

Meals



Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest)

Today you will have an excursion to Taktsang Monastery, also known as the Tiger's Nest (approx 5 hours walking tour). This afternoon you will drive to the ruins of Drukgyel Dzong followed by a visit to Kyichu Lhakhang in the evening. Overnight in Paro.

B L D

Also known as the **Tiger's Nest**, the **Taktsang Monastery** is perhaps the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries and is perched precariously on the side of a cliff, 900m above the Paro Valley. It is said that Guru Rinpoche, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism and the Buddha of our time, came here on the back of a tigress to meditate, hence the name. This site has been recognised as a most sacred place and was even visited by the Tibetan Buddhist Lama, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, in 1646. All Bhutanese people visit this monastery at least once in their lifetime. On 19 April 1998, a fire severely damaged the main structure of building, but it has now been restored to its original splendour.

The hike to the monastery is a 2-2.5 hour strenuous walk uphill. This can be broken down into three stages and a donkey can be used to ride up to two-thirds of the way. The first stage is trekking to the rocky outcrop across a ravine from the monastery, which takes approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Lunch will be served here later today. The second stage is walking from the cafeteria to the lookout opposite the monastery, which takes close to one hour. The third stage is climbing down 475 steps in the cliff face to the bottom of the ravine, crossing over a stream and waterfall and climbing up another 300 steps to the entrance of the monastery. You will spend up to an hour here and view the cave where Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal meditated.

Cameras are not allowed inside the monastery.

It was in the **Ruins of the Drukgyal Dzong** that the Bhutanese finally defeated the invading Tibetans and drove them back. The peak of Jumolhari 'Mountain of the Goddess' can be seen on a clear day from here (7,329 mts/24,029 ft.).

The **Kyichu Lhakhang** temple complex consists of three temples. The first was built in 1652 on the site of the Guru Rinpoche's meditation in the 8th century. The second was built on the site of a cave that contains a most holy rock with the imprint of the Guru's body. The third temple was built in the 1990s by Ashi Kesang, the Queen Mother of the royal family. The three temples are surrounded by a wall that is made of 108 chortens (shrines).

Overnight in Village Lodge, Paro

Day 15	Paro - Kathmandu	Meals
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Kathmandu

After breakfast, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight to Kathmandu. On arrival in Kathmandu, you will be transferred to your hotel, and the rest of day at leisure. Overnight in Kathmandu.

Overnight in Yatri Suites, Kathmandu

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Day 16	Departure	Meals
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Flight

At an appropriate time, you will be transferred to the airport for your departure flight.

B