

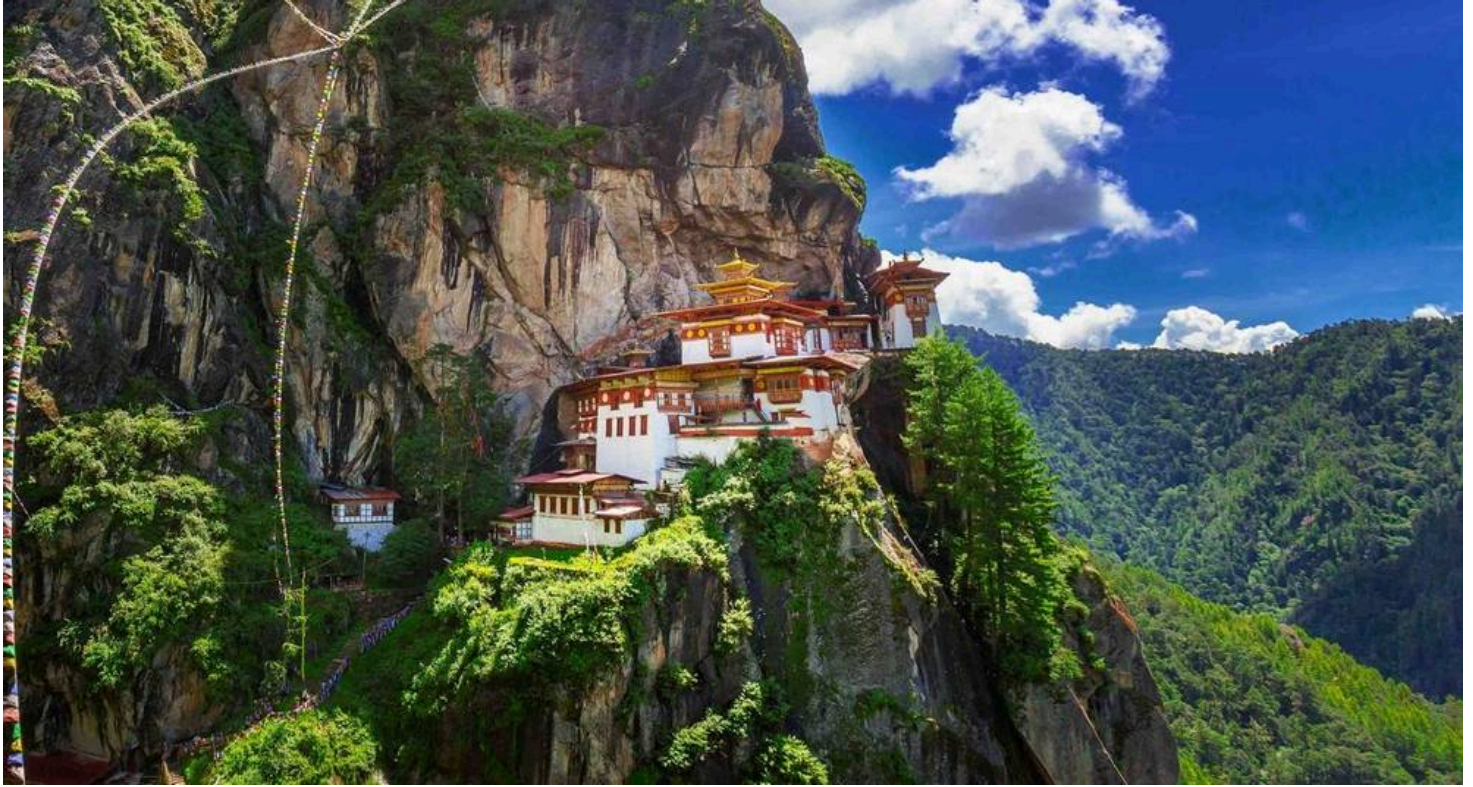
Temples & Trails of Bhutan

Tour Style: Guided walking

Destination: Bhutan

Trip code: BHWHW

Trip Walking Grade: 4



HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

Nicknamed the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon', Bhutan is a hidden Himalayan kingdom where walking holidays are every bit as incredible as you'd expect. Discover golden temples, sky-scraping stupas, and epic views over some of the highest peaks on the planet as our expert local guides lead you through the western valleys of Thimphu, Punakha, and Paro. You'll explore Punakha Dzong Fortress, where all of Bhutan's kings are crowned, marvel at the 'Tiger's Nest Monastery' that clings to a 900m-high cliff face, and trek the sky-high Chele La Pass. Uncover Bhutan's enchanting landscapes and rich heritage on this unforgettable journey.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Return flights from London Heathrow including baggage and transfers
- Guided walks with local leaders
- HF Holidays Tour Manager
- 8 nights' touring accommodation across Bhutan
- 2 nights' accommodation in Delhi
- 10 breakfasts, 8 lunches & 10 dinners
- All sightseeing and entrance fees (as per itinerary)
- All in-destination transport and internal flights

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Embarking on exhilarating hikes in Bhutan's Himalayas
- Marvelling at the magnificent Punakha Dzong Fortress
- Visiting the remarkable Tiger's Nest Monastery, a symbol of Bhutanese spirituality
- Walking Bhutan's highest road, the Chele La Pass
- A longevity blessing ceremony performed by Buddhist monks
- A tour of India's capital, Delhi, and a visit to Humayun's Tomb

ITINERARY

Day 1: Depart The UK

Depart the UK on an overnight flight to India.

Day 2: Arrival In Delhi

Arrive at Delhi International Airport and transfer to your hotel. A symbol of the country's rich past and thriving present, the city of Delhi is where ancient and modern blend seamlessly together. It was the British that moved the seat of their empire from Kolkata to Delhi and it has been the capital city ever since. Enjoy some leisure time before dinner at the hotel. We'll discover more of Delhi upon our return at the end of the itinerary.

Day 3: Delhi – Paro – Thimphu

Today we'll fly to Paro on what is considered one of the world's most amazing mountain flights. Enjoy lunch on arrival (dependent on flight times) before a visit to the National Museum, Ta Dzong, for a fascinating intro to Bhutan's past.

Next, we'll visit picturesque Rinpung Dzong to see the painting of the great saint Milarepa, considered the master of meditation by the Bhutanese. Afterwards, we'll drive to Thimphu for dinner and an overnight stay. In the evening, your local guides will give a short presentation on the trip ahead.

Day 4: Thimphu

Spend the day exploring Thimphu, with a visit to Zorig Chosum, a school for studying traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts. We'll also visit the post office – Bhutan is known for its unusual stamps, and here you can make your own personalised stamps. Next, we'll visit the Motithang Takin Preserve to look out for Bhutan's national animal, the takin.

Later, in a local cafe, we'll get a talk from an expert in Buddhism. We'll then visit the Shakyamuni Buddha bronze statue (51.5 metres tall) in Kuensel Phodrang Nature Park. The day ends with a trip to local art gallery, VAST Studio, and a stroll around the town's craft bazaar or vegetable markets.

Day 5: Thimphu To Punakha

Distance: 3.7 miles (6km)

Ascent: 1,300 feet (400m)

An early morning drive takes us to Dochula Pass, 3,000 metres above sea level. Enjoy breakfast with views of Himalayan peaks and 108 memorial chortens (stupas). Next, we'll visit the Druk Wangyal temple and hike through flower-filled forests and meadows to the 18th century Lungchutse Lhakhang. Soak up 360-degree views of Bhutan's high peaks before we transfer to Lampelri Botanical Garden for a picnic lunch. There's time

for a stroll around the park and a presentation on Bhutan's flora and fauna with our local ecologist expert.

We continue by bus to the Punakha Valley and participate in a tea ceremony with the locals. We'll spend the night in Punakha.

Day 6: Punakha Buddhist Learnings

We visit Chimi Lhakhang, a temple dedicated to a 16th century monk famous for amusing folklore stories. See a Longevity Blessing Ceremony performed by a high-level monk and enjoy a riverside picnic lunch before a visit to magnificent Punakha Dzong.

We'll explore the hilltop Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Nunnery in the evening. Originally established as a Buddhist College for nuns, it now accommodates approximately 120 nuns. Join the nuns during prayers, reflect on your thoughts and enjoy the serenity and calmness you feel as you listen to the melodious chants.

Day 7: Punakha Temple Hike

Distance: 6.2 miles (10km)

Ascent: 985 feet (400m)

Drive north of Punakha Dzong for a hike to Yuwo village through rice fields and up to Chorten Nyingpo Temple. Enjoy a picnic lunch in the monastery courtyards, and then serve tea to the resident monks.

Optional walk towards Zhoshi village and up to Khamsum Yueling Temple. As part of your optional activity, we'll walk to Yebeesa village for evening tea with the farmers.

Day 8: Punakha To Paro

Distance: 5 miles (8km)

Descent: 656 feet (200m)

This morning we'll drive to Sieupang, followed by a hike through pine forests to Toeb Chadhanang. This heritage home holds the relics of Lama Drukpa Kunley, also known as the Divine Madman. We then hike further up to our picnic spot near a stream. Following lunch, our walk will take us steadily back to the highway from where we'll drive back to Paro. We break up the journey with a visit to Tachogang Lhakhang, built by Thangtong Gyalpo, the renowned Iron Bridge Builder. Here, you can see remnants of his famous iron chains.

Day 9: Chele La Pass Hike

Distance: 3 miles (4.5km)

Descent: 1,300 feet (400m)

Today, we drive west to Chele La Pass (3,988 metres). At the pass, we'll take the trail southeast to explore greater heights and views. Enjoy a picnic lunch before hiking to Kila Goenpa through highland conifers, rhododendrons, and other flora. This region is home to rare pheasants, especially visible in the spring. The highlight of the hike is reaching the nunnery built on the sheer cliffs, providing a wonderful opportunity to serve tea to the nuns. Later, we return to Paro Valley.

Day 10: Tigers Nest Monastery And Paro Valley

Distance: 4 miles (6.5km)

Ascent: 2,300 feet (700m)

Hike to Taktsang. Known as the Tiger's Nest, it's one of the most memorable highlights of Bhutan. We embark on an early morning trip with breakfast at the Taktsang Cafeteria. The magnificent Taktsang Monastery, perched on a sheer cliff-face 900 metres above the valley floor, is a dream for every Buddhist pilgrim. For non-Buddhists, the hike represents a symbolic inner journey, making this a unique Himalayan experience.

Any guests who prefer not to hike to the monastery can spend the day exploring the Paro Valley. Lunch can be taken in a local restaurant offering views of the monastery. After lunch, we'll return to the hotel to relax.

Day 11: Paro To Delhi

We bid goodbye to Bhutan today and head to Delhi for an overnight stay.

In the afternoon there's a guided tour of New Delhi, which reflects on the legacy the British left behind. Highlights include a drive past India Gate, the 42-metre-high War Memorial Arch, the Parliament House, the Secretariat buildings and the Vice Regal Palace. Later, we'll visit the 16th century Humayun's Tomb, the first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent and a precursor to the Taj Mahal. We'll also stop by Sunder Nagar Nursery - a 16th century heritage park complex, a UNESCO world heritage site. Final group dinner together in the evening.

Day 12: Depart Delhi For The UK

Transfer to Delhi airport for your return flight to the UK.

ACCOMMODATION

The Suryaa, New Delhi

The Suryaa is a haven of peace and tranquility amidst the hustle and bustle of India's capital city. After a day of exploring, retreat to elegantly designed rooms complete with all mod cons and take advantage of four different dining venues with a wealth of options. Other facilities include a state-of-the-art fitness centre, plus a swimming pool and spa area.

Druk Hotel, Thimphu

You can explore Bhutan's capital with ease from the Druk Hotel. Spend your days discovering the sights before returning to comfortable rooms that come with décor inspired by elements of nature. Relax in the newly renovated Hi Jinks bar and enjoy quality dining in the hotel's contemporary restaurant. Guests can also make use of the free fitness room and spa facilities (payable locally).

Lobesa Hotel, Punakha

This simple-yet-stylish retreat offers an ideal base for discovering Punakha's pleasant walking trails and historical treasures. Rooms command impressive views of the Bhutanese countryside and provide all the comforts required for a relaxing stay. The hotel also houses its own restaurant serving authentic local cuisine.

Naksel Boutique Hotel & Spa, Paro

Immerse yourself in luxury at Naksel Boutique Hotel & Spa in Paro. Sleek, modern rooms combine traditional Bhutanese architecture with modern amenities. Surrounded by Bhutan's beautiful nature, it's the perfect place to enjoy breathtaking views, rejuvenating spa treatments, and a serene escape from the everyday.

USEFUL HOLIDAY INFORMATION

Weather & Seasonality

The central valley of Punakha, enjoy a semi-tropical climate with cool winters, whilst Paro Thimphu, have a much harsher climate, with summer monsoon rains and winter snowfalls which may block passes leading into the central valleys for days at a time. Winter in Bhutan is from mid-November till mid-March, and at this time of the year the climate is dry and sunny for the most part, temperatures peaking at around 15 degree centigrade in the daytime and falling below zero at night. The monsoon usually arrives in mid-June, with light rain falling mainly in the afternoons and evenings. At the end of September, after the last of the big rains, autumn suddenly arrives, and is a magnificent season for trekking until November.

Essential Information

It's best to be prepared for all weather conditions. To make it easier, here is a list of items you should consider packing.

Essentials

- Walking boots
- Waterproof jacket
- Waterproof trousers
- Insulated jacket/top
- Walking clothing
- Walking socks (plus spares)
- Sunhat
- Gloves/mitts and warm hat
- Water bottle (minimum 2 litre capacity)
- Headtorch
- High-factor sunscreen (minimum SPF 30)
- Sunglasses with a dark lens
- Rucksack (15-30 litres)
- Mobile phone
- Personal first aid kit (containing your medication, blister plasters, etc.)
- Passport
- Visa (if applicable)
- Copy of your travel insurance policy
- UK Global Health Insurance Card (**formerly known as EHIC**)

Recommended

- Collapsible walking poles
- Swimwear and travel towel
- Snacks
- Dry bags
- Rubbish bags
- Insect repellent

Optional extras

- Camera
- Sit mat
- Flask for hot drinks
- Durable lunch box
- Gaiters
- GPS device

Passports & Visas

Visa clearance documentation: Visa clearance documentation will be sent you prior to your travel date. You must produce the visa approval document and e-tickets at the time of boarding the flight to Bhutan. The actual visa stamping is done at Paro Airport. Please post these documents in your traveling mailbox. In the event you lose the papers you can always download from the mailbox.

Please make sure to travel with the same passport on which the Bhutan visa was issued. We will not be held responsible if the passport on which the visa was issued does not match the passport used to travel to Bhutan. In such an event, you will not be allowed to board the flight or enter Bhutan.

Other Country Visas: Druk Air and Bhutan Airlines do not have inter airline agreements with most of the international carriers and hence transfer of baggage during transit will not be facilitated. Guests will have to pass through the transiting country's immigration, collect bags and then check in for the Bhutan flight when travelling to Bhutan. After departing Bhutan, guests will have to pass through the transiting country's immigration, collect bags and then check in for the onward international flight. Please ensure that the you obtain the necessary visa for the transiting country (a double entry visa is the min recommended) and ample transit time should be kept between connecting flights.

Passport & visa arrangements: Your passport should be valid for at least six months after your planned date of departure from Bhutan.

Useful Information

Visitors to Bhutan must obtain travel insurance that is valid for the entire duration of the trip. We recommend visitors to arrange their own travel and medical insurance coverage before departure. For Trekkers, your medical insurance coverage must include provision for evacuation by helicopter in case of emergencies. Minimum cost for a rescue helicopter costs \$3500 per hour.

Most of the major towns and cities in Bhutan are equipped with basic communication facilities that include telephone, fax, and internet service. Most of the bigger hotels provide email, internet and WiFi facilities within the hotel premises. Visitors can get a sim card from visitor information centers on arrival, branch offices of Bhutan Telecom and Tashi Cell or from authorized agents in towns.

Due to the wide range of temperature and climatic conditions it is advisable to dress in layers. For protection against cold, layered clothing is better than one or two thick garments. Clothing should preferably be made from natural materials, which allow the body to breathe. Bring comfortable, well-worn clothing, and plenty of underwear and socks. If traveling in the cold season, bring two sets of silk vests and long johns, as they are warm and dry quickly after washing.

Dress modestly and respectfully for visits to monasteries, Dzongs and other religious institutions. Remove hats, caps etc. before entering, and refrain from smoking on the premises.

Modest Dress

On your trip we advise you to dress modestly and respectfully. Both men and women should aim to cover their shoulders and knees, especially if visiting religious sites or rural areas. Opt for loose-fitting and conservative clothing to show respect for local customs and traditions.

Luggage

Druk Air & Bhutan Airlines Checked Baggage Allowance (International Flight)

The checked baggage allowances on scheduled international flights are as follows:

Economy Class 30 kg

Infants paying only 10% of the applicable air fare are not entitled to any free baggage allowance.

WHAT TO PACK

The following is an exhaustive list of what you should pack for the trip. Please carefully read the sections on Climate and Clothing under General Information (below) before packing your clothing.

(1) Everyone: small day pack; proper pouch to hold your travel documents, money, air tickets and other valuable items/documents; clothes as per season, & a poncho or rain gear &/or umbrella (June-September); facecloth, soap, hair shampoo, cold water detergent, sunglasses/spare glasses, comfortable walking shoes, pocket knife, hat, camera and accessories insect repellent, hand cream, torch or flash light with spare batteries, sun cream, lip salve, soluble aspirin, antiseptic cream, anti-histamine cream, anti-diarrhea pills, a preparation for the relief of sunburn, and any medication you take regularly, or might need to take for a periodically recurring condition, such as asthma.

There are many dogs in settled areas. They sleep in the day and roam around at night. Bring earplugs if you think their barking might bother you.

If you wear contact lenses, bring a pair of spectacles as well, as at high altitudes contact lenses can irritate the eyes.

(2) Trekkers: In addition to the above, comfortable trekking boots which have already been broken in and plenty of pairs of socks, noting that woolen socks dry quicker than cotton ones. Also bring a water bottle and plastic bags for packing clothing while on trek, as plastic bags are banned in Bhutan.

Local Currency

Bhutan's currency is the Ngultrum (Nu.). The Ngultrum is fixed to the value of Indian rupees. You are advised to carry your money in the form of cash (US dollars would be best), which might be used for incidental purchases/expenses. There are bank branches in all major towns.

Electricity

In Bhutan, electricity runs on 220/240 volts, with round hole two-pin and three-pin power outlets. If you bring electrical appliances, also pack appropriate adapter plugs. In Thimphu electrical appliance shops stock adapter plugs, but they are unlikely to be available elsewhere.

TRIP NOTE VALIDITY

These Trip Notes are valid based on the date printed at the bottom of the page. They will occasionally be updated post booking and pre-departure. We will send you the latest trip notes prior to departure through a link in your pre departure documents or we can send you a copy in the post if preferred.

In booking this trip you should be confident in your ability to participate in all activities described in these Trip Notes. If you have any doubt about your suitability you should call HF Holidays and ask to speak to one of the team about this itinerary.

The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith. Where differences exist between the Trip Notes and our current brochure, the Trip Notes supersede the brochure. All holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; so please be prepared to be flexible where necessary. At times, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned due to weather conditions, political, physical or other factors. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

Document produced: 16-01-2025

