

Bhutan: The Last Himalayan Kingdom

With Rich Pagen and Shirley Campbell

Bhutan | 15 Days | November 7 – 21, 2024



Travel with Rich and Shirley



Rich Pagen

ORNITHOLOGIST | NATURALIST

As an expert guide and educator, Rich brings to life the fascinating stories of wildlife and wild places. He takes a special interest in the role nature has played in shaping human cultures around the world.



Shirley Campbell

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGIST | AUTHOR

More than three decades of academic research and university teaching have led Shirley to a sound knowledge and understanding of many cultures around the world and the theoretical foundations that human societies share. Now widely traveled, she has had firsthand experience of the ways in which communities form and develop distinct, yet interrelated cultures.

Adventure highlights

- Attend the Black-necked Crane Festival to enjoy folk songs celebrating the cranes and masked dances performed by monks, local people, and children.
- Hike to Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest), Bhutan's most famous pilgrimage site perched on a cliff overlooking the Paro Valley.
- Spend two full days in Thimphu, the main residence of the king, and visit the National Library and Folk Heritage Museum.
- Explore the deeply spiritual Bumthang region, a beautiful area of open countryside dotted with tiny villages and sacred monasteries.
- Meet with locals to learn about the age-old rituals and traditions of Bhutanese life.

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A striking place of magic and myth, the lush Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan brims with a wealth of natural beauty, vibrant culture, and awe-inspiring spiritual and historical attractions. Perched high in the Himalayan Mountains, it is the world's last remaining Buddhist kingdom, and has earned the nickname the Last Shangri-La. In addition to the stunning landscapes dotted with golden-roofed temples and fortress-like monasteries, travelers to this country will also experience the strong sense of culture and tradition that binds the kingdom. Unique in today's world, Bhutan practices a "high value, low impact" approach to tourism and has developed the philosophy of Gross National Happiness; where economic prosperity is measured using a holistic approach of well-being, instead of gross domestic product. With over 70% of the country covered by forest, Bhutan is also the only carbon negative county in the world.



Itinerary

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2024

Bangkok, Thailand

Arrive in Bangkok and check in to your executive level room at the Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel. The rest of the day is at leisure to relax after your flight. This evening, gather with your expedition leaders and fellow travelers for welcome cocktails followed by dinner.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8

Bangkok / Paro, Bhutan / Thimphu

After breakfast, board our flight to Bhutan. Upon arrival enjoy lunch at a local restaurant which may include ema-datse (chili-cheese) and red rice, a famous Bhutanese specialty found throughout the country. After lunch check in to the Druk Hotel. After some time to rest, tour Bhutan's capital this afternoon with a chance to browse the crafts bazaar where we will find a variety of locally made masks, paintings, fabrics, and more.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9

Thimphu

Spend the day exploring Thimphu, the main residence of the king. Highlights include the National Library, Folk Heritage Museum, and Institute of Traditional Medicine, where medicines and medical practices are administered according to ancient customs. You will start the day with a stop at the world's largest seated Buddha statue, perched on a hill overlooking Thimphu. Other cultural attractions visited include the Buddha Dordenma, Changangkha Lhakhang temple and monastic school established in the 12th century, and the Zilukha nunnery, one of the few surviving nunneries in Bhutan. Later we visit the Takin Nature Preserve to view the intriguing national animal which resembles a cross between a goat and an antelope. Continue to Wangdi-tse Monastery, built in 1750, for impressive views over the valley.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10

Thimphu / Phobjikha Valley

This morning depart for a full day, 5-hour drive, to the glacial-carved Phobjikha Valley with stops en route to appreciate the stunning mountain vistas. At nearly 11,000 feet, Dochula Pass offers breathtaking views of forested mountain slopes surrounding verdant Phobjikha Valley. In the afternoon, visit the Crane Information Center to learn about the black-necked cranes that migrate to the valley from Tibet every winter. Check in to Hotel Phobjikha for dinner and overnight.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11

Phobjikha Valley

Spend the day exploring magical Phobjikha Valley. A special highlight of our time here is the opportunity to witness the annual, Black-necked Crane Festival held in the courtyard of Gangtey Goemba, an impressive Buddhist monastery with spectacular views of the valley below. The festival includes folk songs with environmental themes, as well as masked dances performed by the monks, local people, and children. Then take a walk on the Gangtey Nature Trail, a popular downhill hike, keeping an eye out for birds and wildlife. Time permitting, pay a visit to resident families to learn more about the customs and traditions of Bhutan.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12

Phobjikha / Bumthang

A 5-hour drive takes us to Bumthang, the religious heartland of Bhutan and home to many of the country's oldest and most sacred monasteries. This is also an important agricultural area with many farms and orchards scattered across the wide, fertile valley. Learn about the production of Yathra, a colorful hand-woven woolen cloth, at the Yathra Weaving Center in Chumey Valley. After this, sample local

delicacies while touring a brewery and cheese factory. Check in to the Swiss Guest House for dinner and overnight.

WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13 & 14

Bumthang

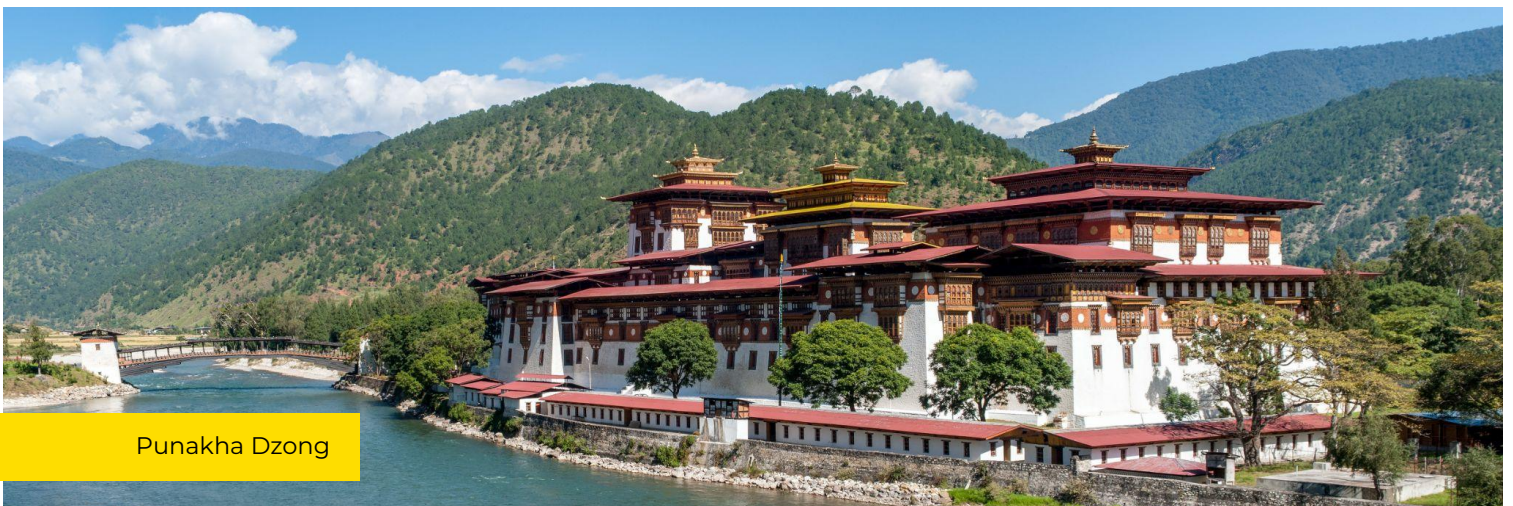
Spend two full days exploring the lovely valleys of Bumthang. First we'll visit the Jambay Lhakhang temple, built by a Tibetan emperor to ward off a demoness during the 7th century. Stroll to the nearby Kurje Lhakhang where it is believed that those who crawl through the rock passage at Sangay Lhakhang will leave their sins behind. After lunch at a local restaurant, continue to Jakar Dzong, or "Castle of the White Bird" built in 1549. This was the seat of the first king of Bhutan and is located on a picturesque ridge overlooking the Cheokhor Valley.

The next day, we'll drive through lush farmland to the Tang Valley, visiting small rural villages and farmhouses along the way for intimate one-on-one experiences with locals. Visit the 16th-century Ugyen Choling Palace, which houses a small museum that offers insight into the lifestyle of a noble Bhutanese family and Mebar Tsho "Burning Lake" one of Bhutan's most sacred pilgrimage sites. After lunch take a hike along the Bushman Trail for magnificent views of surrounding countryside, as well as the Pema Cholling Nunnery and Zangdopelri Monastery.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15

Bumthang / Trongsa

Today, drive to Trongsa via Yotongla Pass, making frequent stops for photography along the way. After lunch in Trongsa, visit Trongsa Dzong, the country's largest fortress and ancestral home of the royal family, and Ta Dzong, an ancient watchtower that now houses a museum with displays of royal memorabilia. Check in to Yangkhil Resort for dinner and overnight.



Punakha Dzong

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16

Trongsa / Punakha Valley

Enjoy a scenic drive into the Punakha Valley, the former capital of Bhutan and seat of government until 1955. Located at an elevation of 1200 meters above sea level, this agriculturally rich part of Bhutan produces rice, fruits, and various vegetables. Two of Bhutan's precious rivers converge here, the Mo Chu and Pho Chu, and at their confluence stands the majestic Punakha Dzong. The riverbanks of Pho Chu are home to the last surviving populations of the critically endangered, white-bellied herons. Upon arrival, check in to the Meri Puensum Hotel.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17

Punakha Valley

Depart early this morning for a visit to the 17th-century Punakha Dzong, the "Palace of Great Happiness," a perfect example of Bhutan's fine architectural and artistic traditions, set at the confluence of two rivers. Later, take a short hike to the Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, dramatically set on a ridge overlooking the countryside. Then take a short downhill hike through pine forest and rice fields. Enjoy the remainder of the day at leisure.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Punakha Valley / Paro

After breakfast, depart for the 3-hour drive to Paro. Make a stop en route at Chimi Lhakhang, a temple dedicated to fertility built by Lama Drupka Kunley, one of Bhutan's favorite saints, nicknamed "The Divine Madman" for his eccentric behavior. There will also be an opportunity to go for a stroll at the Royal Botanical Garden. Keep an eye out for resident birds as you wander colorful trails lined with numerous species of rhododendron. Continue over Dochula Pass into Paro.

In the afternoon we'll tour Paro Dzong, built in 1644. This ancient fortress is a perfect example of Bhutanese architecture, consisting of a complex of courtyards, temples, and government offices. The next stop is Ta Dzong, a watchtower built to defend Rinpung Dzong during the inter-valley wars of the 17th century. Today, Ta Dzong serves as the National Museum and holds a fascinating collection of art, relics, religious thangka paintings, and Bhutan's exquisite postage stamps. Attend an archery demonstration to witness the national sport of Bhutan before checking in to Hotel TenzenLing.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Paro

Today is dedicated to Bhutan's most famous and most photographed monastery: Taktsang, also known as the Tiger's Nest. Perched on a cliff above the Paro Valley, this is the site where Guru Padmasambhava, who is credited with introducing Buddhism to Bhutan, meditated in a cave for three months in the 8th century. A wonderful hike, coupled with dramatic scenery and the melodic murmur of chanting monks. This is sure to be a trip highlight. After lunch, enjoy the afternoon at leisure to explore on your own. This evening, gather at the hotel for a festive farewell dinner.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

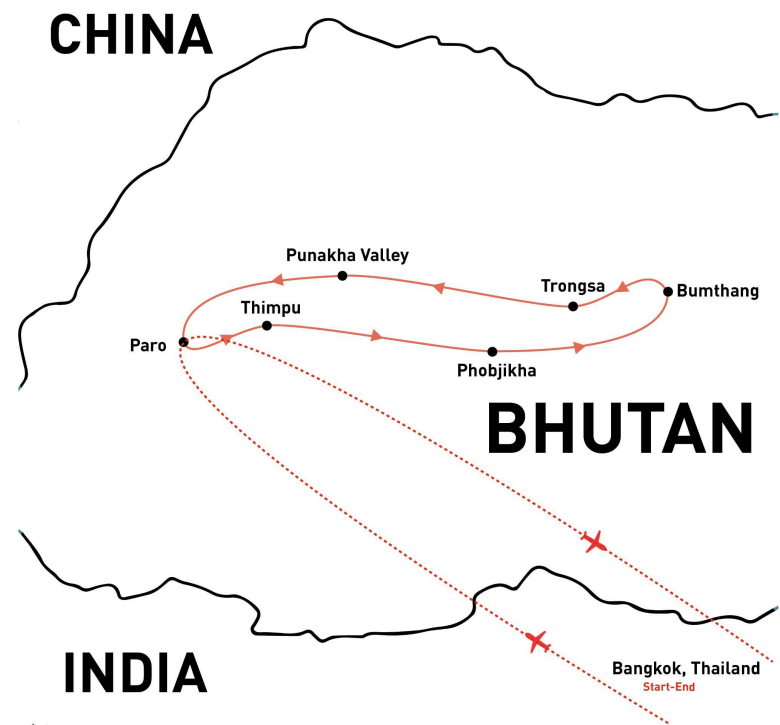
Paro / Bangkok, Thailand

Board our flight to Bangkok and check in to your executive level room at the Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel with the rest of the day at leisure.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21

Bangkok / Depart

Board your independent homeward flight.



View the itinerary online at
miruadventures.com



Monks at Chimi Lhakhang



Bumthang



Ta Dzong Watchtower



Seated Buddha in Thimphu



Traditional Dress at Trongsa Dzong

Why we love this trip



"Bhutan is one of those mysterious countries, often hidden behind veils of upper atmospheric vapors. The ancestors of the people who have made their homes in the deep valleys and high peaks of this land have had to make many material and economic sacrifices and in so doing have developed a rich tapestry of spiritual connection to the land and to each other. The particular kind of Buddhism practiced here, in both ritual and scripture, reflects these choices. I am looking forward to pulling back the veil to expose some of the traditions that sustain a hardy people."

Shirley Campbell

PRICE

\$12,980 per person
(add \$2,490 for a single room)

Deposit Amount:

\$2,000

*Price includes Bhutan's mandatory
\$2,600 Sustainable Environment Fee*

Group size: 16 travelers

INCLUSIONS

- 14 nights accommodations
- All meals including tea and soft drinks
- All excursions, transportation, and local guides
- Park fees, taxes, and permits
- Gratuities
- Round trip airfare between Bangkok and Paro
- Arrival and departure transfers



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