



Overland Journey Through Bhutan - 15 Days

Day	Destination
	Samdrup Jonkar
	Trashigang
	Mongar
	Bumthang
	Gangtey
	Punakha
	Thimphu
	Paro

Day 1: Day 01: Arrive Samdrup Jongkhar

Arrive Samdrup Jongkhar – the Bhutanese border town where your Trail Blazer Tours representative will receive you and then taken to your hotel. There is little to see in this area, other than the busy market which straddles the border.

Evening take an exploratory walk around town and local market. Overnight at the hotel in Samdrup Jongkhar. (Altitude 280m)

Day 2: Day 02: Samdrup Jongkhar – Trashigang

After breakfast proceed to eastern Bhutan town of **Trashigang (approx.. 180 kms / 6 hrs)** . Once the centre of a busy trade route with Tibet, Trashigang is today the junction of east-west highway with road connecting to Samdrup Jongkhar and then to the Indian States of Assam. This town is also used as the market place for the semi nomadic people from Merak and Sakteng whose costumes are unique in Bhutan.

En route take a short stop at **Khaling**. 'Kha' in Bhutanese language Dzongkha means 'Bird' and 'ling' means 'valley'. This is one of the most enchanting, haunting and lush green fertile valley, blessed with innumerable variety of birds and their songs. One of the oldest School, established in 1978 is located here known as 'Jigme Sherubling Higher Secondary School'. **At Khaling, we also get opportunity to explore Bhutanese textile weaving.**

Drive further via **Kanglung town**. It is home of Sherubtse college, one of the Royal University of Bhutan's famous academic institutes.

On arrival in Trashigang check-into the hotel. Evening visit **Trashigang Dzong**, built in 1659, the Dzong serves as the administrative seat for the district as well as the home of the monk body. The Dzong commands a remarkable view over the surrounding countryside.

Day 3: Day 03: Day in Trashigang

After breakfast, we visit the temple of **Gom Kora**, set on a small alluvial plateau, overlooking the river, 24 km from Trashigang. Gom Kora is a famous place, as Guru Rinpoche is said to have subdued a demon here, trapping it in a rock. We continue on down the road to Doksum **village**, where you may see women busily weaving traditional Bhutanese fabric. The road turns into the hills here, running up the side of a winding river valley to Trashiyangtse.

In former times, Trashiyangtse was an important center because it lies on one of the caravan routes leading from western and central Bhutan. Trasiyangtse is now a rapidly growing town and the administrative center for this district. The area is famous for its wooden containers and bowls, which make inexpensive, attractive and useful souvenirs of a visit to this remote region.

We will visit **Trashiyangtse Dzong**, which overlooks the town and was built in the late 1990s when the new district was created. If time permits, we will also visit the dazzling white stupa of Chorten Kora on the riverbank below the town.

Also visit **Chorten Kora**. This dazzling white stupa is situated on the riverbank below the town. Constructed in 1740 by Lama Ngawang Loday, it is built in the same style as Bodhnath stupa in Nepal, with eyes painted at the four cardinal points. During the second month of the lunar calendar there is an interesting celebration here, known as 'Kora'. Bomdeling A pleasant walk of about three hours from Chorten Kora, Bomdeling is an annual migration place for black-necked cranes, which fly over from nearby Tibet to pass the winter months in a warmer climate.

Day 4: Day 04: Trashigang – Mongar

After breakfast proceed onward to **Mongar (approx.. 96 kms / 3hrs)**, the second largest town in the sub-tropical east, Mongar like Trashigang, is situated on the side of a hill in the contrasts to other towns of Western Bhutan which was built on the valley floor.

En route take a detour to visit **Drametse Lhakhang (about 45 min drive one way)**. Meaning, '*the peak without enemy*', is one of the largest and most important monastery in eastern Bhutan, situated about 18 km away from Trashigang to Monger highway. The lhakhang was founded by a highly accomplished Ani (nun) named Choten Zangmo in the 16th century, the granddaughter of the famous religious master Terton Pema Lingpa (the Treasure Discoverer). The lhakhang is deeply associated with Terton Pema Lingpa and the Peling tradition of Buddhism. It houses a full range of spiritual treasures and other sacred objects and is the source of spiritual inspiration to the people of Drametse and neighbouring communities.

Drive onward to **Mongar**. It is site of one of Bhutan's newest Dzong built in 1930s. Yet the Dzong is built in the same method and traditions of all the other Dzongs; no drawings and nails have been used. A visit gives visitors an impression of how traditional Bhutanese architecture has continued to thrive through the centuries.

Day 5: Day 05: Mongar – Bumthang

After breakfast leave on to one of the most scenic journey to **Bumthang (approx.. 196 kms / 7 hrs)** . It is one of the most beautiful journeys in the Himalayas crossing 4,000m high **Thrumshing la (pass)**. Gushing waterfalls, steep cliffs with even steeper drops, blazing flowers and constantly changing vegetation combine to make this journey as varied as it is beautiful.

En route visit fascinating **Ura valley (3100m)** which is highest of the four Bumthang valleys. Villages in Ura have clustered houses, which is quite unusual in Bhutan. Take a walk around the beautiful village and also visit temple dedicated to Guru Rinpoche. Inaugurated in 1986, it contains a huge statue of the master and remarkable paintings of the cycle of his teachings. Since last 35 years Ura has been transformed from a marginal community to prosperous valley.

Day 6: Day 06: Bumthang

After breakfast visit **Kurje Lhakhang**, consisting of three temples. The one on the right was built in 1652 on the rock face where Guru meditated in the 8th century. Second temple is built on the site of a cave containing a rock with the imprint of Guru's body and is therefore considered the most holy. The third temple was built in 1990s by Ashi Kesang, the Queen Mother. These three temples are surrounded by a 108 chorten wall.

Then proceed to **Jambay Lhakhang**. This monastery was built in the 7th century by Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. It is one of the 108 monasteries built by him to subdue evil spirits in the Himalayan region. Its present architectural appearance dates from the early 20th century.

Jakar Dzong, founded by great grandfather of the first Shabdrung is next in sightseeing schedule. This Dzong was initially built as a monastery in 1549. It was upgraded after the Shabdrung had firmly established his power in 1646. The Dzong is now used as administrative centre for Bumthang valley, and houses the regional monk body

Afternoon drive across the River to **Tamshing Lhakhang**. Located across the river from Kurje Lhakhang, this temple was founded in 1501 by Terton Pema Lingpa, the re-incarnation of Guru Padsambhava. The monastery has very ancient religious paintings like 1,000 Buddhas and 21 Taras (female form of Buddhistava). The temple was restored at the end of the 19th century.

Evening visit to **Lhodrak Kharchhu Monastery**. Located above the main town, about 3 km from Chamkhar town, the monastery was founded by Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche in 1984 who was recognized at a very young age by H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama and H.H. 16th Karmapa as 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 with increase in number of monks to almost four hundred. The monastery has become part of an extensive effort to preserve and revitalize Tibetan culture.

Day 7: Day 07: Bumthang – Gangtey (Phobjikha)

After breakfast drive to **Gangtey (Phobjikha) – approx.. 153 kms / 6 hours**.

Visit the **Trongsa Dzong**. Built in 1648 it was the seat of power over central and eastern Bhutan. Both the first and second Kings of Bhutan ruled the country from this ancient seat. All four Kings were invested as Trongsa Penlop ('governor') prior to ascending the throne, and the present Crown Prince now holds the post. The Dzong is a massive structure with many levels, sloping down the contours of the ridge on which it is built.

Later visit the **Ta Dzong** – a cylindrical stone structure rising five storeys, was built in 1652 by Chogyal Minjur Tempa, a task entrusted to him by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. After more than 350 years, it has been resurrected into a classy museum, that represents a tasteful blend of tradition and modernity.

Then drive onto Gangtey, passing through dense forests of oak and rhododendron trees.

The valley of Gangtey is one of the most beautiful and unspoiled places in Bhutan. The surprise of finding such a wide, flat valley without any trees after the hard climb through dense forests is augmented by an impression of vast space and is an extremely rare experience in Bhutan where most of the valleys are tightly enclosed. A few kilometers beyond the Gangtey Monastery, on the valley floor lies the village of Phobjikha.

Day 8: Day 08: Gangtey

Early morning visit **Monastic School to witness prayer ceremony**. Later after breakfast visit **Gangtey Goemba** (monastery), perched on a ridge overlooking the valley. It is directed by Gangtey Tulku, the ninth reincarnation (a "Tulku" is a reincarnate) of Pema Lingpa—a famous Buddhist saint and teacher.

Then take a walking excursion to **Gangtey Nature Trail**. This pleasurable walk will give you a nice feel of Phobjikha valley. From the small hilltop overlooking Gangtey Goemba, you head downhill through flower meadows to Semchubara village and from here through beautiful forests and into the open valley. The trail ends at local community school after passing a chorten and Khewa Lhakhang. (approx. 5.5km, 2 hours walk).

Post lunch explore fascinating **Phobjikha valley**. This place is the winter home of black necked cranes that migrate from the arid plains in the north to pass winter in milder and lower climate. The valley boasts two beautiful meandering rivers, Nakay Chhu (Chhu Naap-black water) and Gay Chhu (Chhu Karp-white water).

Also visit **Black Neck Crane Information Centre**. Situated on the edge of the forest and wetland along the main road of Phobjikha valley, the black-necked crane information Centre has an observation room equipped with high power telescope and spotting scopes for catching the best view of the cranes. The centre also offers display information that outline the natural and cultural history of the area. There is a small gift shop, which sells handicrafts produced by the local people.

Day 9: Day 09: Gangtey – Punakha

After a leisurely breakfast leave for Punakha (approx.. 85 kms / 3 hrs)

Punakha at an altitude of 1300m/4265ft, is blessed with a temperate climate and owing to its natural drainage from Pho Chhu (male) and Mo Chhu (female) rivers, the Punakha valley produces abundant crops and fruits.

On arrival in Punakha, check into the hotel.

Later in the day, proceed to visit **Punakha Dzong** (the ‘Palace of Great Happiness’), a massive structure built at the junction of two rivers. Built in the 17th century by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (who founded the Kingdom of Bhutan), the fortress once housed the country’s government. It is now the winter home of Je Khenpo, the head abbot of Bhutan, along with a retinue of 1,000 monks.

Afterwards a short walk across farmhouses and rice paddies takes you to **Chimi Lhakhang**, a 15th-century fertility temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint, popularly better known as the ‘Divine Madman’. This site has long been a pilgrimage for couples hoping to start a family.

Evening visit a beautiful **typical farmhouse**. Bhutanese farmhouses are very colorful, decorative and traditionally built without the use of single 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.

Day 10: Day 10: Punakha

After breakfast, visit **Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang Nunnery**. Perched on a ridge amid pine trees and overlooking valleys of Punakha and Wangdue gleams Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup temple. It houses a 14-foot main bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara and of Guru Padsambhava, Gautam Buddha, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, Tsela Namsum, the 21 Taras and Tsepamay (Buddha of longevity). The temple complex also houses a permanent higher learning and meditation centre for nuns where, apart from religious training, it provides life skill training such as tailoring, embroidery, statue making and thangkha painting.

Thereafter, a beautiful hike takes one to the regal **Khamsum Yuelley Namgel Chorten**, which was built to remove negative forces and promote peace, stability and harmony in the changing world. The Chorten dominates the upper Punakha Valley with commanding views across the Mo Chhu and up towards the mountainous peaks of Gasa and beyond.

Post lunch, excursion to **Talo village**, which is scattered along the hill slopes and known for its cleanliness and hygiene among Punakha villages. Talo is the seat of the mind incarnations of the Zhabdrung. Talo Sangnacholing Dzong is built on a plateau and has majestic view of surrounding

villages. The beautiful farmhouses of the village have its own flower gardens and on the hill slope corns and sweet peas are grown in abundance. Spend time at **Nobgang** and **Talo villages** visiting farmhouses and meeting families, experiencing Bhutanese rural life.

Also visit **Nalanda Buddhist Institute**. Locals call this place 'Dalayna' and the monks call it Nalanda Buddhist College. The Nalanda Buddhist Institute is a monastic school near the village of Talo, above the Punatsangchu river. **Here you've opportunity to interact with monks, for knowledge on Buddhism, process of meditation.**

Day 11: Day 11: Punaha – Thimphu

After breakfast, drive to **Thimphu (approx.. 75 kms/3 hrs)** crossing Dochu – La

The capital town of Bhutan and the centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimphu is a unique city with unusual mixture of modern development alongside ancient traditions. Home to civil servants, expatriates and monk body, Thimphu maintains a strong national character in its architectural style.

Dochu-la pass located at a height of 3,088m/ 10,130 ft is a scenic location with chortens chorten, mani wall, and prayer flags which decorate the highest point on the road. If skies are clear, it may be possible to see the following peaks from this pass in the order left to right: Masagang (7,158m), Tsendagang (6,960m), Terigang (7,060m), Jejegangphugang (7,158 m), Kangphugang (7,170 m), Zongphugang (7, 060 m), a table mountain that dominates the isolated region of Lunana – finally Gangkar puensum, the highest peak in Bhutan at 7,497m, after this uplifting experience return to Punakha.

Afternoon do a tour of Memorial Chorten and Buddha Point.

Memorial Chorten: The stupa built in the memory of Bhutan's third King, His Late Majesty, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, who is popularly regarded as Father of modern Bhutan. The paintings and statues inside the monument provide a deep insight into Buddhist philosophy.

Buddha Point (Kuensel Phodrang). Located at a short drive from Thimphu city center, visitors can get a good overview of the Thimphu valley from the Buddha point (Kuensel Phodrang). You can pay your obeisance and offer prayers to the Buddha, the largest statue in the country and then walk around and take a glimpse of the valley.

Evening an exploratory walk around Thimphu city centre.

Day 12: Day 12: Thimphu

After breakfast, proceed for the tour of city's main attractions that includes:

Textile Museum: is worth a visit to get to know the living national art of weaving. Exhibitions introduce the major weaving techniques, styles of local dress and textiles made by women and men.

National Library: The history of Bhutan lies imprinted in archaic texts, which are preserved at the National Library. Besides thousands of manuscripts and ancient texts, the library also has modern

academic books and printing blocks for prayer flags.

Institute for Zorig Chusum: Commonly known as Arts & Crafts School or Painting School, the Institute offers a six-year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. On a visit, one can see students learning the various skills taught at the school.

Simply Bhutan Museum: The newly commissioned museum depicts the ancient Bhutanese architecture which is being lost to modernization. The uniqueness of the structure is in its composition of the materials used. The structure is built reusing old timber, window and door frames and other items from traditional and old demolished houses. The best part is the portrayal of the age-old lifestyles of the Bhutanese people.

Changangkha Lhakhang: It is a fortress like temple and monastic school perched on a ridge above Thimphu, south of Motithang. The temple was established in 12th century on a site chosen by Lama Phajo Drugom Shigpo, who came from Tibet. The central statue here is Chenrezig in a manifestation with 11 heads. From temple courtyard, there is fascinating view of Thimphu valley.

Trashichhoedzong, “fortress of the glorious religion”. This is the center of government and religion, site of monarch’s throne room and seat of Je Khenpo or Chief Abbot. Built in 1641 by the political and religious unifier of Bhutan, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it was reconstructed in 1960s in traditional Bhutanese

Day 13: Day 13: Thimphu – Paro

After breakfast we continue our fascinating journey towards Paro (approx.. 55 kms / 1 ½ hrs), with a stop at **Simtokha Dzong**.

Simtokha Dzong was built in 1627 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it stands on a low ridge 8 km down the valley from Thimphu. The Institute for Language and Cultural Studies is located within the premises. The most noteworthy artistic feature of this dzong is the series of over 300 finely worked slate carvings behind the prayer wheels in the courtyard. Later continue the drive towards Paro.

Afternoon visit **Ta Dzong**, originally built as Watchtower, which now houses National Museum. The extensive collection includes antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons & armour, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artifacts.

After the visit walk down the trail to visit **Rinpung Dzong**, meaning (“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.

Day 14: Day 14: Paro

After breakfast the morning is reserved to visit **Taktsang Monastery** (approx 5 hrs walk), one of the fabulous locations in the known world. The Taktsang Monastery is one of the most famous of Bhutan’s monasteries, perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery and hence it is called ‘Tiger’s Nest’. This site has been recognized as a most sacred place and visited by

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646 and now visited by all Bhutanese at least once in their lifetime.

Afternoon drive to **Drukgyel Dzong**, a ruined fortress where Bhutanese warriors fought Tibetan invaders centuries ago. The snowy dome of sacred Chomolhari, “mountain of goddess” can be seen in all her glory from the approach road to the Dzong. En route visit the 7th century **Kyichu Lhakhang**, one of the 108 temples built in the Himalayas by Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. The building of this temple marks the introduction of Buddhism in Bhutan. Later return to the hotel.

Day 15: Day 15: Paro – Departure

At an appropriate time, your Trail Blazer Tours representative will assist and transfer you to Paro airport for the onward flight.

About Tour

This cultural holiday to Bhutan is perfect if you like to take in the local culture while keeping active. This journey covers the hidden treasures of Eastern Bhutan, Trashigang, Mongar and travel towards west visiting Bumthang, Punakha, Thimpu and Paro.

Highlights

Culture

- Explore the Eastern Bhutan
- Bhutanese Textile
- Temples of Trashigang
- Museums
- Hike to Tigers Nest
- Farmhouse visit at Punakha
- Black Neck Crane Information Centre at Phobjikha
- Visit to the monasteries