

A TASTE OF BHUTAN



*Myths
and Mountains*

Especially Designed For:

xxxxx

2016 Trip Dates:

May 12-26



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A Taste of Bhutan

DAY	DESCRIPTION	HOTEL	MEALS
May 12	Depart from JFK on TK12 departing at 2355 for Istanbul.	None	None
May 13	Arrive Istanbul on TK12 at 1645 . Connect with flight to Delhi on TK716 departing at 1955 .	None	None
May 14	Arrive Delhi on TK716 at 0435 . VIP greeting and transfer VIP lounge if you wish, and then met and transferred to Indigo Air Desk for flight to Kathmandu on 6E-31 (1105/1300) . On arrival in Nepal, clear customs and immigration. Met and taken to Dwarikas. Optional afternoon walk down Asan Tol to Dhurbar Square to get a sense of the effect of the earthquake and state of rebuilding. Thali dinner at Dwarikas Krishnapan Restaurant	Dwarikas – Deluxe Heritage Room	D
May 15	Fly Kathmandu to Paro on B3772 (1020/1145) – business class . After clearing immigration and customs, drive to Thimphu. <i>Stop at Sisina Farmhouse and Iron Bridge</i>	Taj Tashi – Deluxe Room with a Sit Out	B,L,D
May 16	Mandala making, Visit Memorial Chorten, textile museum and paper factory. Afternoon walk to village school for arts and crafts. <i>Visit Zuleta Nunnery. Dinner with local lawyer</i>	Taj Tashi – Deluxe Room with a Sit Out	B,L,D
May 17	In the morning visit Etho Metho School to watch morning exercises. Head to READ Library in Changiji and see suburbs of Thimphu. Next drive Punakha over Dochu La. Optional hike up to Lungchuzeykha Temple.	Uma Punakha – Valley View Double	B,L,D
May 18	Tsa Tsa Making and Prayer Flag Hoisting at dzong and at Chimi Lhakang with a talk by a senior monk. Visit home and a dzong.	Uma Punakha – Valley View Double	B,L,D
May 19	Drive Bumthang via Trongsa and Museum. Private tour with the Director	Amankora Bumthang	B,L,D
May 20	Visit Jakar Valley – Jakar, Kurjey, cheese factory, Tamshing.	Amankora Bumthang	B,L,D
May 21	Visit Tang Valley. Private tour of Oygencholing with family member and lunch there. Visit Mebartso for chanting and meditation guided by a monk.	Amankora Bumthang	B,L,D
May 22	Drive back to Gangtey Valley and explore as time permits.	Gangtey Gompa	B,L,D
May 23	Drive to Paro, with lunch, weather permitting, at the Botanical Garden. Walk around town and visit Duntse temple.	Uma Paro – Valley View Double	B,L,D
May 24	Taksang Pilgrimage either on foot or by horse. Visit Kyichu Gompa. Farewell dinner.	Uma Paro – Valley View Double	B,L,D
May 25	Depart Bhutan for Delhi on KB240 (0730/1050) . On arrival, met and taken to the Oberoi Gurgaon for the rest of the day.	Oberoi Gurgaon – Deluxe Room	B
May 26	Transfer to airport with VIP assistance. Depart Delhi on TK717 at 0615 . Arrive Istanbul on TK717 at 1035 . Change to TK1 (1340/1735) for JFK.	None	B

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INCLUDED IN COST

- Airfare from Asia to Paro – **Broken out separately**
- Accommodations as listed, including all service charges and taxes
- All ground transfers
- All private excursions with expert English-speaking guides
- All meals as indicated with B-breakfast, L-lunch, D-dinner
- Bhutan visa
- VIP greeting on arrival in Delhi on May 14 and on departure from Delhi on May 26.

NOT INCLUDED IN COST

- Travel Insurance
- International airfare
- Lodging between your destination and United States
- Meals where not indicated with a B,L,D
- Tips/gratuity (porters, drivers, local guides, etc.)
- Domestic and international airport taxes
- Other items of a personal nature including laundry, alcoholic beverages, etc.

ITINERARY

MAY 12: DEPART JFK FOR ISTANBUL

Depart from JFK on **TK12 departing at 2355** for Istanbul.

HOTEL **NONE**
MEALS **NONE**

MAY 13: ARRIVE ISTANBUL, CONNECT WITH FLIGHT TO DELHI

Arrive Istanbul on **TK12 at 1645**. Connect with flight to Delhi on **TK716 departing at 1955**.

HOTEL **NONE**
MEALS **NONE**

MAY 14: ARRIVE DELHI. VIP GREETING. CONNECT WITH FLIGHT TO KATHMANDU. UPON ARRIVAL, MET AND TRANSFERRED TO HOTEL. OPTIONAL AFTERNOON WALK THROUGH TOWN.

Arriving in Delhi on **TK716 at 0435**, as you disembark from the plane, you will see someone holding a sign with your names on it for a VIP arrival – our gift for you. They will help you through formalities and with the check-in for your flight on **6E-31 (1105/1300)** to Kathmandu.

Arriving in **Kathmandu**, you will clear customs and immigration. Leaving the airport, you will be met by our operator holding a sign with *Myths and Mountains* on it. He will transfer you to the hotel to wash up and breathe.

Late afternoon, if you wish, you will take a walk along **Asan Tol**, the market street, and visit **Durbar Square**. Afterwards, you will be returned to the hotel.

Tonight, you will have a traditional welcome dinner at Dwarikas.

HOTEL DWARIKAS – DELUXE HERITAGE ROOM
MEALS DINNER

MAY 15: FLY KATHMANDU TO PARO, BHUTAN. UPON ARRIVAL, DRIVE TO THIMPHU VIA SISINA AND THE IRON BRIDGE.

This morning, you will be picked up about 7AM and taken to the airport to catch **B3772 (1020/1145) – BUSINESS CLASS** to **Paro**. *Be sure to bring your visa letter and your e-ticket.* At the Bhutan Air counter, you will receive your business class seat assignments. On arrival in Paro, your visa is then finally stamped.

After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by your guide representing Myths and Mountains in Bhutan.

Paro is at an altitude of 7545', and serves as an ideal spot for rice growing. The special red rice from this valley has found a home in some of the restaurants in our country also. The valley is also famous for its fruits – strawberries, apples, pears, plums, and peaches. The town center, built in 1985, is quite new, and the main street is parallel to the Paro Chhu (river).

On arrival, you will head to lunch. Then you head out along the Paro-Thimphu Road. Along the way, you will stop at an ancient **iron bridge**, built by one of Bhutan's great leaders.

As you near Thimphu, you will stop at a **private home** – the ancestral home of one of Bhutan's cultural writers and travel experts. Here the owner is building a small museum and if possible, you can stop for tea and learn about family customs.

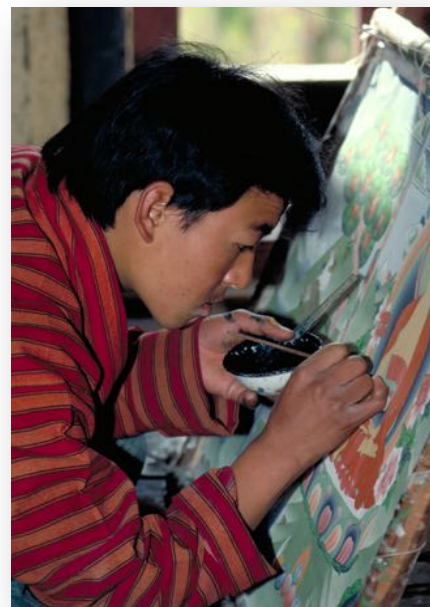
Depending on timing, you might want to enjoy sunset at the Great Buddha.

HOTEL TAJ TASHI – DELUXE ROOM WITH A SIT OUT
MEALS BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

MAY 16: MANDALA MAKING. VISIT TOWN AND CRAFT SCHOOL

You start the day with a **cleansing ceremony**. A Buddhist monk will be requested to conduct the ritual, and you do this before breakfast.

After breakfast you have a presentation by an expert on colors and its interpretation in Bhutan. The presentation will talk about the spiritual journey we are on (specially the participation in rituals, ceremonies and festivals). After a question and answer session you will watch the monks start a mandala using colored rock powder.



Your first stop will be the **Memorial Chorten** to join the local people who begin their day by honoring the gods.

Next you head to the **Textile Museum**, where you can get learn how textiles are woven in Bhutan and the designs that are particular to different parts of the country.

There will also be time to visit the **traditional paper factory**.

After lunch, you can talk a walk through a small village near Thimphu to a local **school for Arts and Crafts**.

If time permits, after visiting the school, you drive up to the **Zilukha Nunnery**.

By evening the monks will have finished the mandala making. After admiring the beauty of the piece, you destroy the beautifully crafted mandala, emphasizing the theme of impermanence in life.

Return for dinner at a **local restaurant called Zsa**. *If possible, you will be joined by a local member of the legal profession.*

HOTEL TAJ TASHI – DELUXE ROOM WITH A SIT OUT
MEALS BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

MAY 17: VISIT ETHO METHO SCHOOL, READ LIBRARY IN CHANGIJI, SEE SUBURB OF THIMPHU AND LATER DRIVE TO PUNAKHA. OPTIONAL HIKE TO LUNGCHUZEYKHA.

This morning you will visit the **Etho Metho School** to watch morning exercises.

Just outside of Thimphu is a more heavily populated area called **Changiji**. Here you can stop and visit the **READ Library**. READ (www.readglobal.org) is a non-profit begun by Myths and Mountains almost 30 years ago. Today, it is a separate 501c3 housed in San Francisco, with its own board and executive director. The goal is to use rural library community centers, combined with a business, to help make villages in Nepal, Bhutan and India viable places for locals to live, learn and prosper. This library in Changiji is a model library for Bhutan.

Next, you will drive out to **Punakha**. The road heads back towards the Simtoka Dzong and then pick up the east-west highway. Perched on a hill above the road, you can see the **Hongsho Gompa**, built in the 15th century by Ngawang Choegyal, a cousin of one of Bhutan's favorite saints – Lama Drukpa Kunley. After passing through the Hongshu check post, the road climbs up through maple and blue pine forests to the 10,334' **Dochu La**. Here, if the sky is clear, you can catch beautiful views of the Bhutan Himalaya. According to the Bhutanese, the area around the pass is holy, and inhabited by a variety of spirits. Beware! One of the spirits is a man-eating demoness.



Once on the top of the pass, you have an opportunity for a gradual hike up the south-face through thick

rhododendron trees. They are not bushes as the trees stand almost 20-30 meters high. Three quarters of the way up, the trail gets noticeably steeper and you need to *slow down*, in order to avoid problems with altitude.

Your final destination is the **Lungchuzeykha Temple**, standing at 11,811 ft. Lungchuzeykha is a beautiful temple, restored by the Queen Mother HM Gyalyum Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. The woodwork inside is mostly from cypress trees and has anti-bug properties. The highlight of Lungchuzeykha is the 360-degree view of all the snow-clad peaks of Bhutan.

On the top, you can have a picnic lunch before starting back down. The entire hike should take about 3 hours.

Back in the car, you begin your descent from the pass and can clearly see the change in vegetation. Your maples and pines have given way to rhododendrons (ours came originally from the Himalayas!), magnolias, cypress, hemlock and fir. Also prominent is the *Daphne*, related to our laurel and used for paper-making. Dropping further in altitude, you begin to see tropical vegetation such as cactus, bamboo, and citrus. Don't forget that Bhutan is about the same latitude as Florida, so it is altitude, not latitude, which determines the vegetation. Your drive takes you past **Thinleygang**, with its holy spring lining the roadside to the road junction at **Metshina**. From here, it is about a half an hour to **Punakha**.

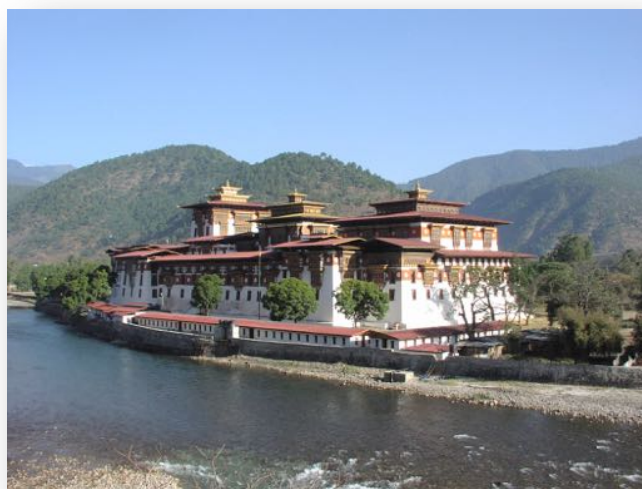
HOTEL **UMA PUNAKHA – VALLEY VIEW DOUBLE ROOM**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 18: TSA TSA MAKING AND PRAYER FLAG HOISTING. VISIT CHIMI LHAKANG AND PUNAKHA DZONG

Today you visit the **Punakha Dzong**. This dzong served as Bhutan's capital from 1637 until 1955, and was the birthplace of many cultural, social, economic and political foundations.

Next you will visit the **Temple of the Divine Madman**. This temple known as Chimi Lhakhang is dedicated to Drukpa Kinley, a popular lama known for a radical approach to Buddhism in the 15th century. The translation of his stories is found in the book, "The Divine Madman" by Keith Dowman. A visit to this temple will answer all the questions as to why some Bhutanese have phallic images painted on their houses. The less dramatic ones are wooden carvings hanging down the roofs at each corner.

You gather here at Chimi to hoist prayer flags. Here we will be building a temple like structure using prayer flags in colors of yellow, green, red, white and blue. This structure will use very little wood, and could be called "the great eco-friendly prayer flag."



After finishing the structure, you drive to the riverside and engage in making **Tsa-tsa**. Tsa-tsa is a little monument that Buddhists use as an offering. Tsa-tsa can be made to benefit a suffering soul of a deceased relative, pet or anybody. It can also be made to increase ones luck-force. A **senior monk (a teacher) will give a talk** on the benefits and reason for Tsa-tsa making. Wheat flour will be used to make these offerings, so that the finished tsa-tsa could be thrown in the river to benefit creatures in the river.

If there is time and you wish, perhaps you can visit a **local home**.

HOTEL **UMA PUNAKHA – VALLEY VIEW DOUBLE ROOM**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 19: DRIVE TO BUMTHANG VIA TRONGSA AND VISIT MUSEUM

Rising early in the morning, you have about a 7-8 hour drive today to **Bumthang**. The distance is not great, but the roads and terrain are a “happening”.

The morning part of the journey climbs until the **Pelila pass (10,827 feet)**. This pass divides western Bhutan from east, and passes through several villages with different dialects. After the pass, you can enjoy the landscape that is mostly pastoral. Travellers & Magician, a Bhutanese film of international fame was mostly filmed here. The **Chendebji Chorten** adds a color on your drive today. Stop by and take a short walk around.



A few switchbacks and you appear at the viewpoint. Everything including the **Trongsa Dzong** looks magnificent from here. Trongsa Dzong, stretching across the hilltop, has carved an important seat in the country’s political history. From 1637 until the end of the 19th century, four chief governors ruled the country, over who sat the elected head of the state. The appointment or election of the state head became a major power struggle and a grave situation for Bhutan. Seeing the importance on one strong ruler, the 19th century Governor of Trongsa was the first to press for a hereditary monarchy. Incidentally it was this governor’s son (Drukgyalpo Ugyen Wangchuck) who became the First King of Bhutan in 1907. Traditionally, today, the Crown Prince must serve under the title of Trongsa Penlop before ascending the throne.

After lunch you visit the **Tadzong**. Tadzong is a fortress turned into a beautiful museum, where collection of items belonging to kings of Bhutan is on display. *You will have the opportunity to visit the museum with the director.*

Next, you drive on through the spectacular mountain scenery, crossing the Yotungla pass. Continue down the Chumey Valley. From here the road to Bumthang rises rapidly till the Kikila pass in a series of hairpin turns. Looking ahead across the valley and the dzong, the view is incredible.

Overnight in Bumthang at an altitude of 9,186 feet.

HOTEL **AMANKORA BUMTHANG**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 20: VISIT BUMTHANG

You have a full day to spend in **Bumthang** and explore some of the valleys – four in number, including Chummi, Jakar, Tang, and Ura.

Many of the small villages you see along the way have retained their century-old way of life, and the handicrafts from this area are exceptional. Bumthang boasts a rich religious and political past. The valleys were the home of the most famous saints of the Nyingma-pa tradition, particularly Pema Lingpa, who was

born in the region and was a *Terton*, a discoverer of religious treasures. The valley was a separate kingdom until the middle of the 17th century, when it was conquered by the Drukpas.

There is much to see. In the Jakar Valley, you will visit the temple dedicated to Jampa, the Buddha of the Future – **Jambey Lhakhang**. Believed to have been built by Songtsen Gampo in 1659 and visited by Guru Rimpoche when he came to Bumthang, the temple is one of the oldest in the country. In this valley of temples, one of the most famous and most loved is **Kurjey Lhakhang**, built in 1652 by the Penlop of Trongsa. A cave beneath the oldest Lhakhang is said to contain the body (*kur*) print (*je*) of Guru Rimpoche, who meditated here on how to save the life of the King, Sindhu Raja, and convert the area rulers to Buddhism.

After lunch, you will drive to the bridge above Kurjey. On the way, you can stop at the Cheese Factory and pick up some delicious nibbles.

Then you walk to **Tamshing**. Tamshing Langrub Chholing, or Temple of the Good Message, was established by Terton Pema Lingpa in 1501, and is the most important Nyingma-pa gumpa in the country. The wall paintings are originals and over 300 years old. A little distance from the temple is a water mill, where people still make flour from barley and wheat.



HOTEL **AMANKORA BUMTHANG**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 21: VISIT TANG VALLEY AND OGYENCHOLING. OPTIONAL CHANTING AND MEDITATION AT MEBARTSO.

Today, you visit the most remote of the Bumthang Valleys – the Tang Valley. The area is the birthplace of one of Bhutan’s major saints, Terton Pema Lingpa, the discoverer of treasures hidden by Guru Rimpoche. The road passes his birthplace, **Chel**, marked by a small chorten.

Your first stop is the **Ogyenchholing Palace**, today an excellent museum offering wonderful insights into the world of the noble families of Bhutan. *You will be escorted by the head of the family that used to live in the Palace.* After visiting the museum, you can have lunch in the garden.

In order to stretch your legs, you can take a walk from the museum down to the river and meet your car and driver. Then you head to **Mebar-tso Lake**, a very holy site and a deep part of the Tang River. Here, the 15th century master, Terton Pema Lingpa discovered several relics. You will visit this special place late in the afternoon, to enjoy the quiet. Here, if you wish, you can sit quietly and do some meditation and possibly chanting. A monk will be there to help with the meditation and the guide will translate.

HOTEL **AMANKORA BUMTHANG**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 22: DRIVE GANGTEY

Leaving Bumthang, you head back along the road you came to the **Gangtey Valley**. Gangtey is home to the aristocratic and endangered black-necked cranes (*grus nigriclis*), who migrate to Bhutan in the winter from Tibet and China. Villagers have many folk stories about these beautiful birds.

In 1992, about 180 birds arrived from Tibet to feed in their traditional valley home. In the fall, depending on weather, one may see the cranes.

When you arrive, you can visit the gompa and take a walk through the small town.

HOTEL **GANGTEY GOMPA LODGE**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 23: RETURN TO PARO VIA BOTANICAL GARDEN – WALK AROUND TOWN AND VISIT DUNGTSE TEMPLE

The drive to Paro takes around 4 hours, excluding stops. On the way, weather permitting, since you like plants and flowers, you can stop at the **Botanical Garden for a picnic lunch**. If the weather is bad, lunch will be in Thimphu.

Continuing on, you will arrive in **Paro**. Here you have time to walk around and do some last minute shopping. *If you wish, you can buy prayer flags to take with you up Taktsang tomorrow*. Today you will also visit the small Dungste temple.

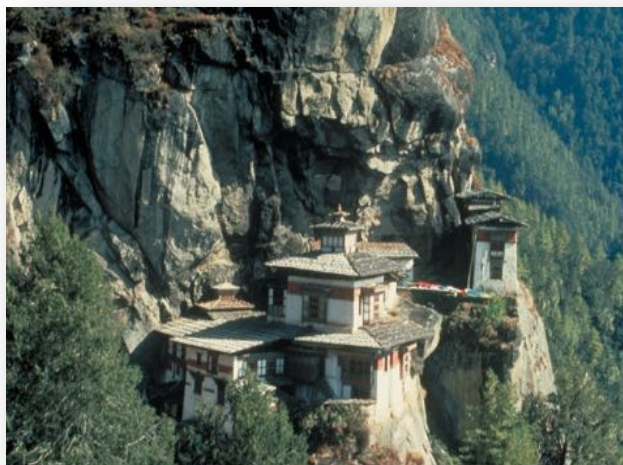
HOTEL **UMA PARO – VALLEY VIEW DOUBLE ROOM**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 24: TAKTSANG PILGRIMAGE AND VISIT TO KYICHU

Today, your last day in Bhutan is very special. You will take horses and ride up, or walk if you prefer, to **Taktsang Monastery**. Taktsang is a sacred pilgrimage site where the great tantric mystic, Padma Sambhava, flew on the back of the tiger and brought the teachings of the Buddhist Dharma to Bhutan. The monastery clings to a cliff soaring 3,000 ft. above the valley floor at an altitude of 10,000 ft.

Lunch will be at the cafeteria on the way. The way is steep and it is dangerous to ride the horses down the hill. As such, you will return slowly, walking downhill for approximately 2 hours.

Today, if you wish, you can hang prayer flags with multiple colors to wish others good tidings. In Bhutan, people relate unhappiness to imbalance of greed, anger, ignorance, ego and jealousy. When colorful flags are hung, it is believed to enhance the balance of the above attributes and create happiness. The Bhutanese believe that others' happiness creates the environment for our



happiness.

When you finally reach the base of Taktsang, if you have it in you, you should stop at **Kyichu Gompa**, dating back to the time of Songtsen Gampo and also visited by Guru Rimpoche.

Tonight you will have a final dinner in Bhutan.

HOTEL **UMA PARO – VALLEY VIEW DOUBLE ROOM**
MEALS **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER**

MAY 25: DEPART BHUTAN FOR DELHI, UPON ARRIVAL TRANSFER TO THE OBEROI

Rising at the crack of dawn, you grab something to nibble on and head to the airport to catch your **business class flight on KB240 (0730/1050)** via Kathmandu for **Delhi**. On arrival, after clearing immigration and customs you will be met and taken to the **Oberoi Gurgaon** for the night.

HOTEL **OBEROI GURGAON – DELUXE ROOM**
MEALS **BREAKFAST**

MAY 26: DEPART DELHI FOR HOME

Very early, you will be driven to the airport. Here you will be met and helped through a **VIP departure** as part of our gift to you. Depart Delhi on **TK717 at 0615**. Arrive Istanbul on **TK717 at 1035**. Connect with **TK1 (1340/1735)** for JFK.

HOTEL **NONE**
MEALS **BREAKFAST**