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# Tour Notes

Discover Bhutan

Tour Duration – 13 Days



## Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●●○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●● | Wildlife ○○○○

## Tour Pace

Busy

## Tour Highlights

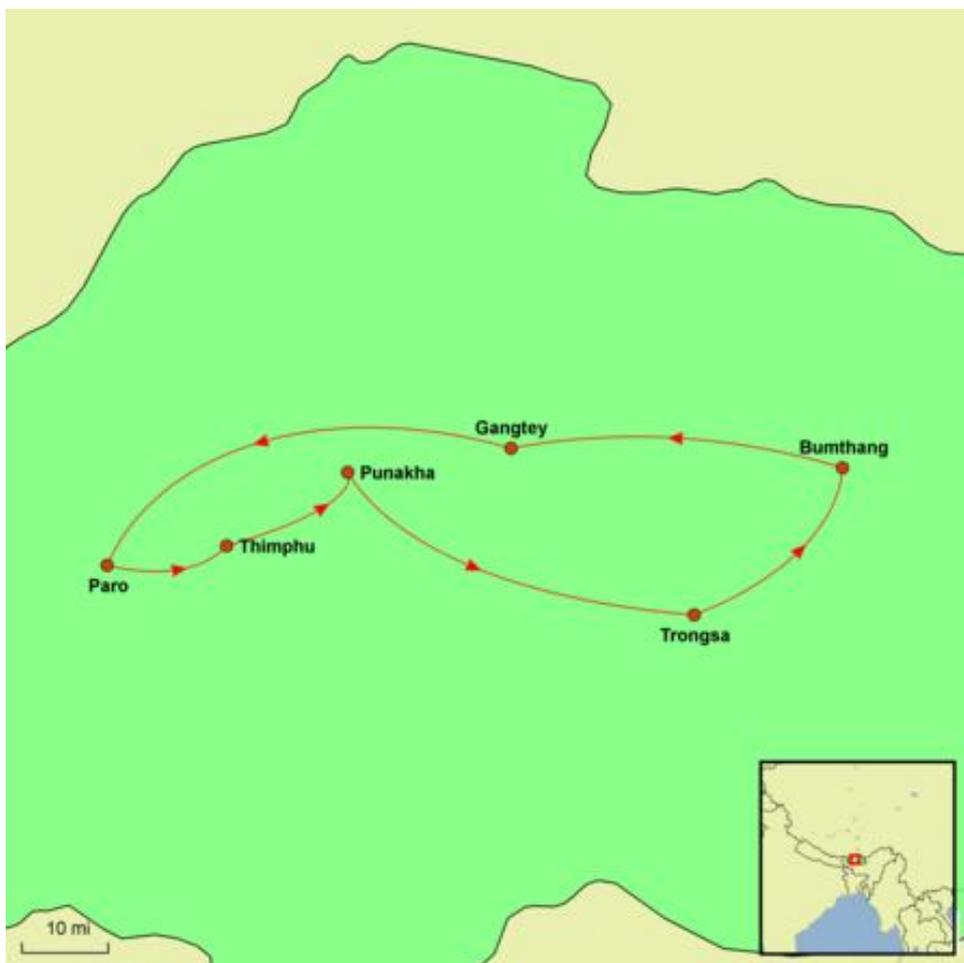
- ✓ The Sacred Tiger's Nest Monastery with its spectacular location
- ✓ The beautiful valleys and landscapes of Bhutan
- ✓ The opportunity to observe the enduring traditional lifestyle and rituals of the local people.





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## Tour Map - Bhutan - Festival Tour



### Tour Essentials

**Accommodation:** Mid-range comfortable small hotels  
**Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunch (L) and dinner (D) as shown in the itinerary  
**Group Size:** Private tour  
**Start Point:** Thimphu  
**End Point:** Paro  
**Transport:** Private car or bus  
**Countries:** Bhutan





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### **Bhutan- Discover Bhutan**

Tucked away in a remote corner of the Himalayas, Bhutan is a nation unlike any other, a tranquil idyll where people still wear national dress and gross national happiness is more important than gross national product. Once closed to the outside world, Bhutan now allows a limited number of travellers to experience its charms. Our tour to this beautiful nation allows a glimpse of some of its most spectacular sights, from the amazing Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery in its dramatic cliff face location to the imposing Punakha Dzong, an incredible fortress with a turbulent past. We travel through spectacular Himalayan scenery and have the opportunity to visit traditional Buddhist temples. This trip offers you a marvellous insight into the scenery and way of life of this remote mountain kingdom

### **Tour itinerary notes**

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

### **Tour Guide**

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. On this tour you will generally have the same guide throughout your trip.

## *Itinerary*

### **Day 1 – Paro- Thimphu**

Arrive at Paro International Airport which is situated in a beautiful valley at 2280 metres and is a fitting introduction to this charming kingdom. Your guide will meet you and take you on a short one-hour drive along the Paro and Thimphu river valleys to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital. Overnight at Galingkha Hotel or similar. (D)

### **Day 2 - Thimphu**

Today we will visit the weekly market, the revered Memorial Chorten and the School of Traditional Arts. Then we visit Changangkha temple, perched on the hilltop overlooking the town. Devotees flock throughout the day to turn the prayer wheels. The temple also contains beautiful wall paintings and hundreds of religious scriptures written in gold. In the afternoon we will drive up to the Radio Tower (offering splendid views of the city from a hilltop festooned with prayer flags), visit the Takin Reserve showcasing the unique national animal, the Takin, browse the striking collection of intricate textiles at the National Textile Museum or visit the Folk Heritage Museum. Overnight at Galingkha Hotel or similar. (BLD)

### **Day 3 - Punakha**

In the morning we drive approximately 3 hours to the old capital, Punakha, via Dochu La pass at 3050 metres, where we will stop for a hot drink and enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalaya ranges. In the afternoon, we visit the imposing Punakha Dzong, "Palace of Great Happiness". We then take a pleasant walk for an hour or so across terraced fields to Chimi Lhakhang built in the 15th century by the 'Divine Madman' (Lama Drukpa Kuenley). Overnight at Meri Puensum Hotel or similar. (BLD)

### **Day 4 –Trongsa**

We drive to Trongsa, the gateway to central Bhutan. Set amidst spectacular scenery, Trongsa Dzong commands the eye from miles away. Take a stroll down the town's main street where you can take lunch,



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then visit the Dzong. You can also visit Ta Dzong, the museum in the watchtower dedicated to the Wangchuk dynasty, which tells the stories of the Dzong and the valley it has watched over for centuries and features personal belongings of the Kings and Queens of Bhutan. Overnight at Yangkhil Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 5- Bumthang**

From Trongsa we continue a further 3 hours through some of Bhutan's most beautiful landscapes to Bumthang, an area of high valleys. Sightseeing in Bumthang, the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, with its many legendary monasteries, temples and palaces. Bumthang is the collective name for an area of 4 valleys - Chokhor, Tang, Ura and Chumey. Your guide will take you on a fascinating walking and/or driving tour of a variety of sacred sites including Jamba Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang and Tamshing Lhakhang, followed by a visit to Membar Tsho 'the Flaming Lake', one of Bhutan's most important pilgrimage sites. You can also visit Bhutan's largest Dzong (Jakar), with its picturesque location overlooking the Chokhor valley. You may be interested to see Bumthang's famous Swiss cheese factory and dairy farm. Overnight at Ugyenling Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 6 - Bumthang**

Take a hike to Babzur via Petseling monastery. We will hike for around 1.5 hours to a tiny village called Changbi where you will be welcomed with hot tea and snacks arranged by your guide. Continue on to Petseling monastery, home to around 70 monks. From here you will have a panoramic view over the Bumthang valley and you can also see the finishing line of Bhutan's most challenging trek, the Snowman trek, in the distance. Continue on to Babzur. The village is located by a beautiful meadow lined with a few prayer flags and views of Kunzangdrak Gompa. After a packed lunch here we walk for another 1.5 hours until we reach the feeder road where the hike ends. Overnight at Ugyenling Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 7 – Gangtey Gompa**

We drive for approximately 7 hours to Gangtey to enjoy the views of the immense and remote Phobjikha valley and the Black Mountain ranges. Our guide takes us to visit Gangtey Gompa (one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries and recently extensively renovated) and we will explore the valley where the villagers continue to live a traditional Bhutanese rural lifestyle. In this area, black-necked cranes visit in their hundreds in November each year after spending the summer in Tibet. Overnight at Dewachen Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 8 – Nature Trail and local villages**

We drive for approximately 7 hours to Gangtey to enjoy the views of the immense and remote Phobjikha valley and the Black Mountain ranges. Our guide takes us to visit Gangtey Gompa (one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries and recently extensively renovated) and we will explore the valley where the villagers continue to live a traditional Bhutanese rural lifestyle. In this area, black-necked cranes visit in their hundreds in November each year, after spending the summer in Tibet. Overnight at Kichu Resort or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 9 – Wangdi and Paro**

Today we return to Paro, a drive of approximately 7 hours via Wangdi. Wangdi (also known as Wangdue Phodrang) was originally considered Bhutan's secondary capital and it commands an important central position. After a brief stop for lunch we will continue on our way. This afternoon we will visit a local farmhouse for tea or dinner (depending on group size) and you can also try the restorative properties of a traditional hot stone bath. Overnight at Tenzinling Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 10 – Paro**

This morning you can visit the National Museum. This was previously housed in the Ta Dzong (watch tower) built on top of the hill above Rinpung Dzong. Unfortunately, an earthquake in September 2011 damaged the Ta Dzong and the contents of the museum were moved to a neighbouring building. You can still see a magnificent collection of Bhutanese artefacts – costumes, religious paintings, arms, textiles and a fascinating collection of Bhutan stamps. The National Museum is due to reopen in the Ta Dzong in 2017. From the





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National Museum, take a leisurely 1-hour hike along the forested hillside to Zuri Dzong and then down to the Uma resort, where your driver will pick you up. The walk passes Gonsaka Lhakhang and then Zuri Dzong and provides wonderful views down over the valley and Dzong. Zuri Dzong dates from 1352 and is home to the valley's local protector gods. On the way visit the impressive Paro Rinpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture. Overnight at Tenzinling Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### Day 11 – Haa

Today we will take a day excursion to Haa at 2670 metres – the drive is around 3 hours each way. We will cross the Chele La pass at 3800m from where you will have a view of Mount Jomolhari to the north as well as down to the Haa valley, and then continue down to Haa town. Haa has only recently opened to tourists and the town is still very small – as yet there are only one or two basic restaurants and local lodges and no tourist hotels, so the area remains quite remote. A great opportunity to view this beautiful rural scene. From Haa you can walk or drive to Katso village and from there you can visit Lhakhang Karpo and Lhakhang Nagpo. In the afternoon return to Paro. Then you can visit a local farmhouse for tea or dinner allowing you to experience traditional Bhutanese village life. Take the opportunity to try the restorative properties of a hot stone bath! Overnight at Tenzinling Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### Day 12 – The Tiger's Nest

Take a day walk to the 'Tiger's Nest', the sacred Taktshang monastery which clings to the rock face 900 metres above the valley floor. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site riding on a tigress. He subsequently meditated here for three months. It is one of Bhutan's most holy sites and draws pilgrims not only from Bhutan but also from neighbouring Buddhist countries. You can have lunch at the Taktshang cafeteria from where you get a spectacular view of the monastery. On the way back you may be interested to visit a manor house turned museum in a local village. The house dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and the museum is designed to showcase the culture of medieval rural Bhutan. Afterwards you may also have time to visit Dumtse Lhakhang, a temple built by Thangtong Gyalpo, the iron bridge builder. Overnight at Tenzinling Hotel or similar. (BLD)

***The ascent to the Tiger's Nest Monastery is very steep and you should be sure that your level of fitness will allow you to make the hike.***

#### Day 13 – Depart Bhutan

Early in the morning your guide will accompany you to the airport to see you off onto your flight and wish you Tashi Delek (goodbye and good luck). (B)

## Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

#### Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers  
Transport throughout  
All accommodation  
Daily breakfast (B), plus lunch (L) and dinner (D) as shown in the itinerary  
Services of English speaking guide  
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

#### Excluded:

International flights including those to and from Paro  
Any airport taxes  
Travel Insurance



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Visas  
Drinks  
Items of a personal nature  
Tips (discretionary)

## Important Information

### Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to Albania. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government

### Accommodation and Meals

#### Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

#### Accommodation Rating

On this tour we use comfortable mid-range small hotels with private bathrooms. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

#### Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Water is included with the meals advised in the itinerary. All other drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

#### Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.





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### **Budgeting for your Tour**

You will need some extra money to cover snacks and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

### **Food**

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

### **Drinks**

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

### **Tipping – Guide and Drivers**

Tipping is common practise in Bhutan. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. This amount can obviously be left to you. When tipping a driver, a guide or hotel staff a few dollars will always be gratefully received

### **Foreign Exchange**

**ATM Availability:** Major towns now have ATM's but they are not totally reliable.

**Credit and Debit Card Acceptance:** Cards are not widely accepted in the region although can be used to draw cash at ATM's.

**Local Currency:** Bhutanese Ngultrum (BTN)

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** US Dollars

**Where to Exchange:** Your tour guide will advise you

### **Joining Your Tour**

#### **Flight Information**

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Any flights included in your tour are made with either Druk Air, the Bhutanese national carrier or Bhutan Airlines (colloquially known as Tashi Air). For the best views it is worth sitting on the left of the plane as you fly into Paro from Kathmandu (and on the right when you fly out). It is amazing how close you get to Everest and the surrounding peaks! Unfortunately we are unable to influence seating in advance, so make sure you get to the airport in plenty of time to request this at check-in. Generally you should check in 2 hours before the flight. In the event of flight delays or cancellations we will attempt to make alternative arrangements so as to keep the tour operating as close to the original itinerary as possible

#### **Joining Your Tour Abroad**

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure include in the tour price. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.



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### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

### Visa Information

Most nationals including UK, EU and US visitors require a visa for entry to Bhutan – the only exception is Indian nationals who will be issued with a 14 day permit on arrival. For other nationalities, a visa will be issued on arrival providing that certain conditions are met. We recommend that you check with your nearest embassy for the most up to date details.

### Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages for each country visited, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

### Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Asia, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. The use of a DEET-containing insect repellent is highly recommended.

Yellow fever

Yellow Fever vaccination is required for travellers who are arriving from, or have transited through, countries with risk of yellow fever transmission.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

## Preparing for your tour

### Climate

The best seasons to visit Bhutan are between the months of March and May, and from September to November. Outside of these times Bhutan experiences its monsoon season (June to August) and its winter



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(November to February). In June and December the weather is still reasonably good – not too much rain in June and still surprisingly sunny in December, if slightly cold.

### **Clothing**

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. Bhutan's evenings can be quite chilly and so you should prepare for this. You may be thankful for some thick socks, hat and gloves as it can get quite cold at night with the altitude and hotels are not well heated.

It is appreciated if you dress reasonably smartly for festivals (e.g. no jeans or trainers if possible).

**Formal dress is required to visit inside Taksang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) and Paro Dzong.** Men should wear long trousers. Short skirts (above the knee) are prohibited. Shirts may be short-sleeved but must have a collar. No vest tops. Any shoes with socks are acceptable (including trainers) but not flip flops or sandals.

You should be prepared for some rain, so bring a light rainproof jacket and if you are planning to try a hot stone bath don't forget your swimming costume.

You should bear in mind that Bhutan tends to have a conservative attitude towards dress. Women, and also to a certain extent men, will find that the way they dress will often determine the degree of respect they receive from both men and women.

### **Equipment**

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. A torch or head torch is useful for any unexpected electricity outages or to assist in dimly lit areas.

### **Footwear**

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended as well as a comfortable pair of shoes/trainers.

### **Luggage on tour**

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable. This weight limit is imposed by Druk Air, who may refuse to take your bag if it weighs over this limit.

### **Other**

Binoculars, torch, water bottle, insect repellent, high factor sun cream (at least factor 15), good quality sunglasses and a lip salve with sun protection. You may wish to take walking poles with you for the Tigers Nest walk.

Many hotels in Bhutan don't have a television, so bring plenty of reading material if you like to read in the evenings.

### **Fitness**

This tour does not require any special degree of fitness but you will find it more enjoyable if you are reasonably fit. There are a number of walks and hikes on this tour which involve steep climbs.

### **Cultural and environmental guidelines**

The Bhutanese are generally tolerant of Westerners and don't expect that they will necessarily follow, or understand, local customs, so they are not quick to take offence, but it is worth bearing in mind the following:



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It is polite to take any items offered to you (or to hold something out to another person) with two hands. This is also often done when shaking hands. If you only use one hand to take something from someone make sure it is the right hand.

Follow your guide's lead - it is customary to remove your shoes on entering the important rooms of temples and private houses.

It is customary to leave a small amount of money on the altar and you will see people touching the note to their forehead first. If a monk is present he will then pour some holy water from a small jug into your hand – if you wish you could make the gesture of taking a sip and then spreading the rest over your head

Don't touch people on the head or feet (although this rule does not apply to small children), and don't point your feet at anyone. If you are sitting on the floor try to sit cross-legged or kneel with your feet behind you.

Don't point at people or religious objects or pictures. If you are indicating something in a painting, use your whole hand, palm upwards, pointing the tips of your fingers in the relevant direction. If you are waving someone towards you use your hand palm downwards

Remember that you should always turn prayer wheels or navigate round a chorten, religious monument or temple in a clockwise direction.

Don't give money or candy to local children. It will encourage them to beg whenever they see foreigners. Instead you could leave small donations to schools or the village development fund so that the money can be used to benefit the whole community.

Haggling is a way of life in Bhutan when making many purchases, especially with tourist souvenirs. Usually, but not always, the vendor will start with a price that is higher than they are prepared to accept, and the buyer is expected to haggle. There are no hard and fast rules with this – some vendors may initially quote a vastly overinflated price, others may start with a price close to the true value, while others may just present you with one price and not be prepared to discuss it. Although many tourists may feel uncomfortable with this, it's important to remember that this is best entered into in a relaxed manner. Once you have agreed upon a price, it is extremely bad form to then not pay this. Please also bear in mind that a small amount of money to you can be a relatively large amount for the vendor, and that it is not necessarily best practice to 'beat the vendor down' to the lowest possible price. Remember that they also have a living to make.

Please make sure that you take any rubbish back to the hotels with you where it can be properly disposed of – this includes cigarette butts as well. Please do not buy any products made from endangered species – this is not sustainable and hastens the species' decline.

Except in a few districts in the east of the country where there is a total ban on tobacco, smoking is still allowed in Bhutan but the sale of tobacco is prohibited. So if you need to smoke, bring your own and be prepared to be taxed on your supplies on entry to the country. There is also a recent law prohibiting smoking in offices and some public places.

It is not advisable to drink untreated water in Bhutan. Mineral water is freely available. We always carry bottles during the day for you to use on the journey. Water in the hotels and restaurants needs to be purchased separately.

Overseas mobiles generally don't work in Bhutan. If you want to you can purchase a SIM card for the B-mobile network and use this in your phone - you need to ensure you have unlocked your phone from your home network first. The mobile network in Bhutan is available across the country, although there are still some black spots. Internet and Wi-Fi is also available in most of western Bhutan and in some other towns



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(including Bumthang), but it is patchy and intermittent with slow speeds, so be prepared for frustrations and delay with connecting this way.

Photography and filming inside temples is not allowed. You should always ask permission before taking anyone's photograph and respect their decision if they say no. In more remote areas women and older people often do not want to be photographed. Some people may also ask for some money – sometimes a little, sometimes a lot - in return for a photo. Taking photos of state buildings and airports can lead to problems with local authorities. If you are unsure about whether it is acceptable to take a photo, please ask your tour leader or guide.

### **Electric Supply & Plugs**

The voltage in Bhutan is also the same as India - 230V, 50 cycles AC.

### **Tour Itinerary Versions**

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 20/04/17