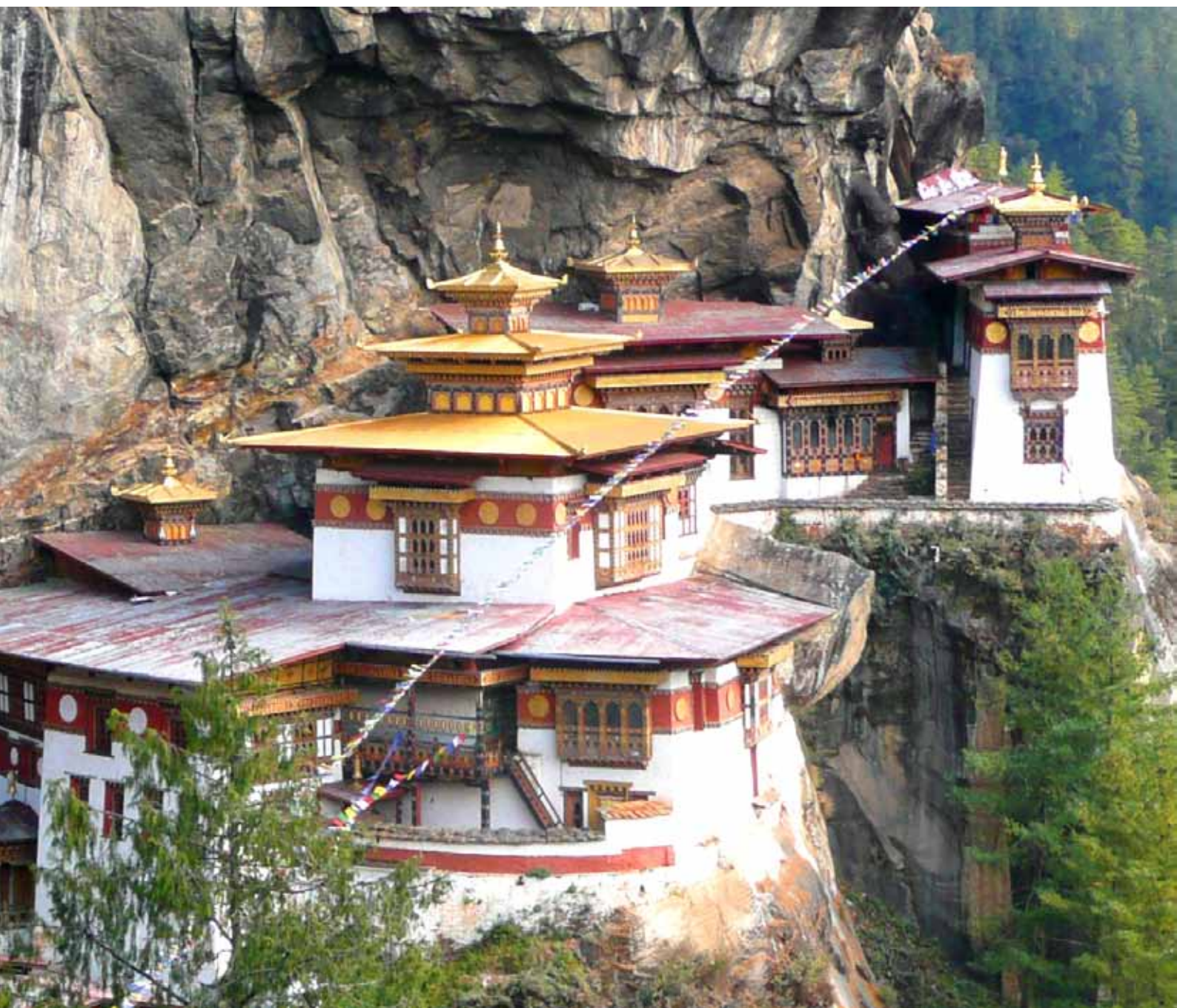


Bhutan's Paro Festival 2012 Information and itinerary



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Introduction

The Paro Festival is one of the highlights of the Bhutanese calendar year. This trip integrates the Festival into a classic culture tour.

Spread over 4 days, the local people come from miles around to celebrate, to dance and to feast. They will be dressed in their 'Sunday best', with many making their own costumes and clothes for the occasion.

The festival takes place in and around the huge Rinpung Paro Dzong and takes the form of stories, played out by the masked dancers who have rehearsed for many weeks; it is a wonderful social occasion.

The itinerary in this document is designed so that you can get the best out of the festival as well as see much of western Bhutan.

We are experts at tailor making trips to suit you as we appreciate the differing flight connections to and from connecting cities (see information on Drukair on page 5). We can adjust itineraries forwards, backwards, extend them or reduce them.

Your trip will be focused on the Festival and the remaining elements will revolve around that. You will spend at least two nights in Paro, which is ample time to see the Festival in full flow and visit the other significant sights in this area, notably the National museum and the Tigers Nest Monastery.

The latter is an icon of Bhutan. Perched 900m up a cliff, this amazing structure is a 90 min—2 hrs walk up a stiff climb but well worth it.

You will also spend at least two nights in the capital Thimphu. Much larger than Paro, this town is quite walkable with lots to see in the surrounding environs; the Takin Reserve is a must as are the views from the 'radio tower'.

The library on the high street is worth a look as are some of the craft shops, thankha painting, the nunnery and of course the Thimphu Dzong. The King's

residence is also close by.

In between, you will head over the Doche La Pass (3141m) and down to Punahka/Wangdi. This valley is much warmer than Thimphu or Paro and has two more fantastic examples of Monasteries.

Also head out to Gangtey where the Black Necked Crane's nest although this is restricted to November.

At some point, you may wish to ask for the opportunity to try a hot stone bath. Your Guide will be able to advise on where this can be done but do give him as much notice as you can. There may be a local charge for this.

The mountain water in these traditional wooden built baths is heated by stones heated on fires for many hours and it is surprising just how fast the water gets hot! Don't be shy, have a go (you can wear swim wear); you may only be there once!

Details

Dates: 31 Mar - 7 Apr 2012

This duration is for inside Bhutan only
We can tailor make dates to suit you

Min/Max pers: 1/16

Accommodation: Hotels

Trip Cost Per Person:

This is an illustrative cost for this itinerary based on an exchange rate of \$1.55 = £1 and travelling in a group of 3 or more.

It excludes Drukair flights.

We won't charge you banking fees.

£1143 pp (1 Jan 2012 onwards)

We will offer a discount to groups of 3 or more.

Tailor Made - Just for you

Tailor made itineraries cost no more than any other; the cost will always be calculated on the number of nights in Bhutan and the number of people in the group (see page 6 for details).

We can speed up or slow down any itinerary, concentrate more on what you like to see or adjust it however you wish.

Tailor made is just for you.

Travel and Trek is a truly independent company specializing in adventure trekking and touring. We pride ourselves on the personal touch and whether you are travelling solo or in a big group, we can adjust your itinerary to suit you.

Important information

Costs

For full details on costs, see page 6.

Fully Bonded

Your money is safe. We are protected by Insurance Passenger Protection (IPP), which protects YOU against OUR insolvency.



Expert Help

If you have any queries in the planning stage of your trip, call our experts

T: 01476 562763
M: 07725 943108

Travelling to Bhutan

Getting to Bhutan is not quite straightforward. Please read page 5 as it may affect your overall travel plans.

Bhutan's Pricing Policy

If you are not aware of Bhutan's unique all inclusive pricing policy for tourism, you are strongly urged to read page 6 first.

Trip Dossier

On booking, you will receive a comprehensive Trip Dossier, which includes:

- Clothing and equipment list
- Medical notes (including vaccination requirements)
- Notes on safe drinking water
- Visas and Drukair e-tickets
- Food, money, electricity, etc.. and more...

Airport arrivals

Your Bhutanese Guide will pick you up on arrival and transfer you back on departure. He will escort you throughout your time in Bhutan.

Passports

Passports should be valid for a minimum period of 6 months on the date on entry into Bhutan.

Tourist Visa

A tourist visa is required for UK Nationals. We will deal with this on your behalf as part of the service; it is standard policy. You cannot apply for the visa any other way. The Bhutanese Tourism Dept will issue the visa to us (by e-mail) and we will forward it on to you. It is issued usually a few weeks prior to departure.

Itineraries

Day 1 of your itinerary is deemed to be your arrival day in Bhutan.

Hotel Accommodation

Bhutan doesn't have a hotel grading system as such. Most hotels used for tourism are of 3* standard with very friendly staff to attend to your every need.

Higher grade luxury hotels/resorts are available at a premium rate.

Singles/Solo Travellers

Solo travellers in a group requesting sole occupation of a room throughout will be charged an additional US\$15 per night. If no request is made, you will be accommodated with another member of the group (same sex). No charge will be made if numbers dictate that this is not possible.

Extended Stays

It is possible to extend your stay in Bhutan; call us to discuss your requirements.

Medical/Vaccinations

You are advised to consult your GP regarding what vaccinations are required although through experience and for your planning purposes you should need:

Hep A, Typhoid, Tetanus, Polio and Meningitis.

The following website offers advice:

<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home.aspx>

Further in depth advice is provided in the dossier.

Local Payments

Travel and Trek does not charge any local payments.

Travel Insurance

It is absolutely vital that you have adequate travel insurance. See separate page 9.

Money

- Credit cards are not widely accepted
- There are no ATM's
- Carry cash and exchange in country if required
- Indian Rupees are accepted in Bhutan although
- Bhutanese currency is not accepted in India (or anywhere else)

Travelling to Bhutan

Planning Your Trip

A long lead in time is required if you wish to secure the dates that you want especially over Festival periods; more if you can.

6 months is not an unrealistic lead in time.

Know when you want to be in Bhutan (arrival and departure dates).

Work your travel dates back from that (see Buffer Time).

Consult the Drukair website for available flights. www.drukair.com.bt

Consult Travel and Trek for availability and confirmation of costs.

You can only travel to and within Bhutan using a recognised Agent; you cannot organise it yourself.

To get to Bhutan, you can either fly, drive or a mixture of the two.

There are now three official road crossings (all on the southern Bhutanese border with India) making access to the more remote eastern side of Bhutan easier.

The Bhutanese Government monitors visitors into and out of Bhutan; they do not restrict.

You are strongly recommended to engage with us at an early stage of your trip planning to take advice of dates and the number of nights that you intend to stay in Bhutan.

Drukair does not fly into Bhutan on a daily basis from each of the cities that it serves (Bangkok is the exception).

A 6 month lead in time is reasonable if you wish to secure the dates that you want especially over Festival periods; more if you can.

Travel and Trek has extensive experience of organising and adjusting your itinerary to take all of this into account.

On entry into Bhutan, you will be met by your Guide who will escort you everywhere. He will be with you until you depart.

Drukair

Drukair is Bhutan's National airline and the main carrier into Bhutan.

Clients can now book flights with the airline directly on line. This has the advantage of getting an instant confirmation of flights allowing you to book associated international flights straight away.

With the exception of Bangkok, Drukair does not fly to every city every day and therefore you need to be aware of its schedule to fit in with your plans. It's schedule can be downloaded from the Drukair website.

Drukair can change its schedule and routings without notice (see Buffer Time).

Factor in a Buffer Time

We strongly recommend that you factor in at least a spare day/night (buffer time) on the end of your stay in Bhutan to counter any changes or delays in your departure (only if departing by air).

Driving

It is possible to drive into Bhutan from India. The most well established and used crossing is at Puntesholding, 5hrs driving south of either Paro or the capital Thimphu. The other two crossings are not so well used due to the distance from airports.

Puntesholing is approx 4hrs from the Indian airport of Bagdogra (or Bhadrapur in Nepal (they are just across the border from each other)), from which you can fly to Kolkata or Kathmandu.

You can also drive up through West Bengal to Darjeeling and or Sikkim thereby making what can be a good circuit.

Travel and Trek can design an itinerary that combines Bhutan, India and/or Nepal.

Paro Airport

Paro is Bhutan's only international airport and is located in a mountainous area with unpredictable weather. The aircraft routinely have to make sharp banking turns on the approach to landing or shortly after take off.

It is subject to Visual Flight Rules (VFR).

This means that if the pilot has no clear vision of the local mountain tops, he will not take off or land. Delays are therefore always possible.

We therefore recommend that you factor in a night in Kathmandu for example (or other city) rather than risk missing a costly international flight to the UK. See Buffer Time.

Bhutan's Pricing Policy

To Work Out Your Holiday Cost

Simply multiply the number of nights in Bhutan by the appropriate nightly fee.

Add the Drukair flight costs.

Add the Tourist visa and Tourist Development fee.

How To Book

Complete the booking form (downloadable from the website) and return it with a deposit of US\$300pp. (equivalent £UK).

Booking forms can be completed electronically and returned as an attachment to an e-mail.

Details of payment options are on the booking form.

Balance payments are due 10 weeks prior to departure.

Bhutan's pricing policy is set by the Bhutanese Govt; not by Agents.

It was originally set to restrict the number of tourists coming into the country and it has worked.

Prices have remained static for a number of years, mainly due to the global economic downturn of late. In June 2011, the Govt decided to raise its prices and they are shown below.

For your all inclusive stay in Bhutan (see page 4 for general inclusions and exclusions), the Bhutanese Govt charges a flat rate fee per person per night (pppn) regardless of what you are doing in Bhutan.

*It should be made clear that a lone traveller joining two other people (or more) for the entire time in Bhutan would constitute a group of 3 and therefore the \$200 fee would apply to all.

A reduction of \$18 pppn is given on stays of longer than 9 nights. It applies to the 10th night onwards.

35% of the fees quoted above go directly to the Bhutanese Govt, which pays for free medical care and education for the entire country. The remainder of the fee goes to the Company in Bhutan providing the service to you.

Why are the prices for Bhutan shown in US\$ and not UK£?

Despite the fact that Bhutan has its own currency (Ngultrum), it quotes US\$ to foreign visitors.

Regardless of what the exchange rates are doing, whatever your fee amounts to for your trip to Bhutan (in US\$), that figure must arrive in the bank in Bhutan.

If you see a figure being quoted in UK£, the company charging that figure has got to offset the potential exchange rate fluctuation and will therefore likely be charging you a higher rate than necessary. By showing you the US\$ figure, you know precisely what you need to pay; it is the cheapest and most transparent method.

We will charge you the appropriate US\$ rate each time a transaction is made to us.

Bhutan's Nightly Rates:

All figures are US\$ and are effective for all trips commencing on or after 1st Jan 2012:

Commencing in Jan, Feb, Jun, Jul, Aug and Dec:

\$250 for a single person travelling alone
 \$240 pppn if the group consists of 2 people
 \$220 pppn if the group consists of 3 people or more

Commencing Mar, Apr, May, Sep, Oct, Nov

\$280 for a single person travelling alone
 \$270 pppn if the group consists of 2 people
 \$250 pppn if the group consists of 3 people or more

Other Fees

In addition to the nightly fee, these charges will also apply:

Tourist visa - US\$20 pp
 Tourist Development fee - US\$3 pp

We can either include the Drukair flight costs with the booking (if we book them for you) or you can book direct with the airline.

Itinerary - Paro Festival 2012

1 31 Mar, Arrive Paro

You will be greeted at the airport and taken on a relaxing drive to the capital Thimphu.

Relax into your surroundings with a stroll along the main street.

2 1 Apr, Thimphu Sightseeing

Today, you can concentrate on Thimphu.

There are so many sights to see in an around here that you will be spilit for choice. There are plenty of short walks, many cultural sights including traditional Thangka paintings, paper factory (hand made), craft making and a nunnery.

You can also visit the Radio Tower, which affords excellent views over the town and don't miss the Takin reserve; the Takin is Bhutan's National animal and is unique to Bhutan.

Overnight Thimphu.

3 2 Apr, Drive to Punahka

The drive to Punahka take you through some lovely countryside and over the 3000m Doche La Pass. Be sure to stop here and enjoy the vast views of the Eastern Himalaya.

In the afternoon, visit the imposing Punakha Dzong followed by an hours stroll through the local area.

Overnight Punahka.

4 3 Apr, Drive to Gangtey

A beautiful drive further east to the remote Phobjikha valley and the black mountain ranges.

Visit Gangtey Gomba (a very old Monastery and recently renovated).

Overnight will be in Phobjikha. This is the favoured place of the black-necked cranes (November).

5 4 Apr, Drive to Paro via Wangdue

It is a long drive back to Paro in preparation for the festival.

The journey is nicely broken up by visiting the Wangdue Dzong. It is small in comparison to some but impressive.

It is then back over the Doche La Pass and continue on to Paro.

Overnight Paro.

6 5 Apr, Paro Festival

The Paro Festival is one of the largest and most spectacular in Bhutan.

Enjoy this colourful extravaganza in and around Paro's imposing Dzong. Your Guide will escort you and explain what is happening as the dancers entertain all day. This is Bhutan at its colourful best; lots of people dancing and entertaining. The dances often tell stories where good triumphs over evil.

You will see locals dressed in their finest clothes and watch the masked dances.

This is a social occasion allowing the locals to break from their daily routine.

You can go and come back as you please.

Overnight Paro.

7

6 Apr, Paro Festival and Sightseeing

The final act of any festival is the unfurling of the huge religious painting down the side of the Dzong.

It takes place in the early hours of the morning!

The remainder of the day is used to see the parts of Paro that you have yet to see, including the Tigers Nest.

The trek up to the iconic 'Tiger's Nest' (locally known as Taktshang) is a stiff 90 min - 2 hrs. Make sure that you are adequately prepared footwear wise; it is quite steep in places.

The Monastery is perched 900 metres above the valley floor and Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site riding on a tigress. He meditated here for three months. The Tigers Nest is a must see for all visitors to Bhutan.

The National Museum sit majestically above the town and can also be visited today.

Overnight Paro.

8

7 Apr, Depart Bhutan

Your Guide and driver will escort you to the airport for your departure flight.

Trip Inclusions and Exclusions

Included:

- All hotel accommodation, sole occupation of a room is an additional \$15 per person per night
- All ground transport (from pick up at the airport to return to airport)
- All meals and mineral water (bottled) whilst 'out and about' (mineral water in hotels is chargeable).
- The services of your Bhutanese Guide, full time.
- All staff and pack ponies for trekking (if applicable)
- All accommodation for the trek (tents)
- Fees to monuments, monasteries, etc...

Excluded:

- International return airfare into Bhutan from your chosen city (charged separately)
- International flights from UK to the access city
- Mineral water inside hotels
- Tourist Visa fee (currently US\$20)
- Tourist Development fee (currently US\$10)
- Local trek staff gratuities

Travel Insurance

It is absolutely essential that you have adequate travel insurance. Be truthful to your insurance company about precisely what activities you are undertaking and if you are trekking, to what altitude (max). Failure to do that may invalidate your policy.

To fly a patient back to the UK under any form of medical supervision (ie on a stretcher) is estimated to cost well in excess of £10,000.

If you are trekking, then in terms of activities for insurance purposes, you are trekking not climbing. There are no treks within Bhutan that require specialist safety or climbing equipment.

This Foreign & Commonwealth Office link is a useful reference and recommended read:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/staying-safe/travel-insurance/>

So What Happens If I Have An Accident?

If you are not trekking then your Guide and his staff will get you to the nearest medical facility as quickly as possible.

Trekkers need to be aware that there are no formal medical facilities in the mountains. It is very remote. Injuries and or illnesses will need to be dealt with from within the group. You therefore need to go well prepared.

Any serious injury that requires professional medical assistance outside the scope of the group may need to call in a helicopter. Bhutan does not have its own helicopter rescue system and those helicopters will therefore be requested to come from India (likely the Indian Army based at Bagdogra).

This will clearly take time. It will also incur significant cost. A previous incident cost the insurance company £17,000 just to get the patient from a mountain location to Paro.

Tip

Have a credit card with you and be prepared to pay for your evacuation if your insurance company can't be contacted immediately. It may save your life.

A Little Preparation May Save Your Life

Some insurance companies provide a very handy credit card sized card with all of their contact details on it. If your company does not, then try using this very handy website Ucardit.co.uk. Travel and Trek clients get a 10% discount.

For about £5 (including P&P), you get a virtually indestructible credit card sized card with all of your important information on it. You can either use one of three pre-designed Travel and Trek cards or design your own. An example is shown below. You can literally put whatever you want on it from flight details, mobile numbers, addresses, insurance details, etc...

To try it, go to the Home page, click 'Travel'. Then scroll down, bottom left, click on the 'Travel and Trek' banner and either use a branded template or design your own. These are example cards from the website (not full size).

