

Bhutan's Thimphu Festival 2012

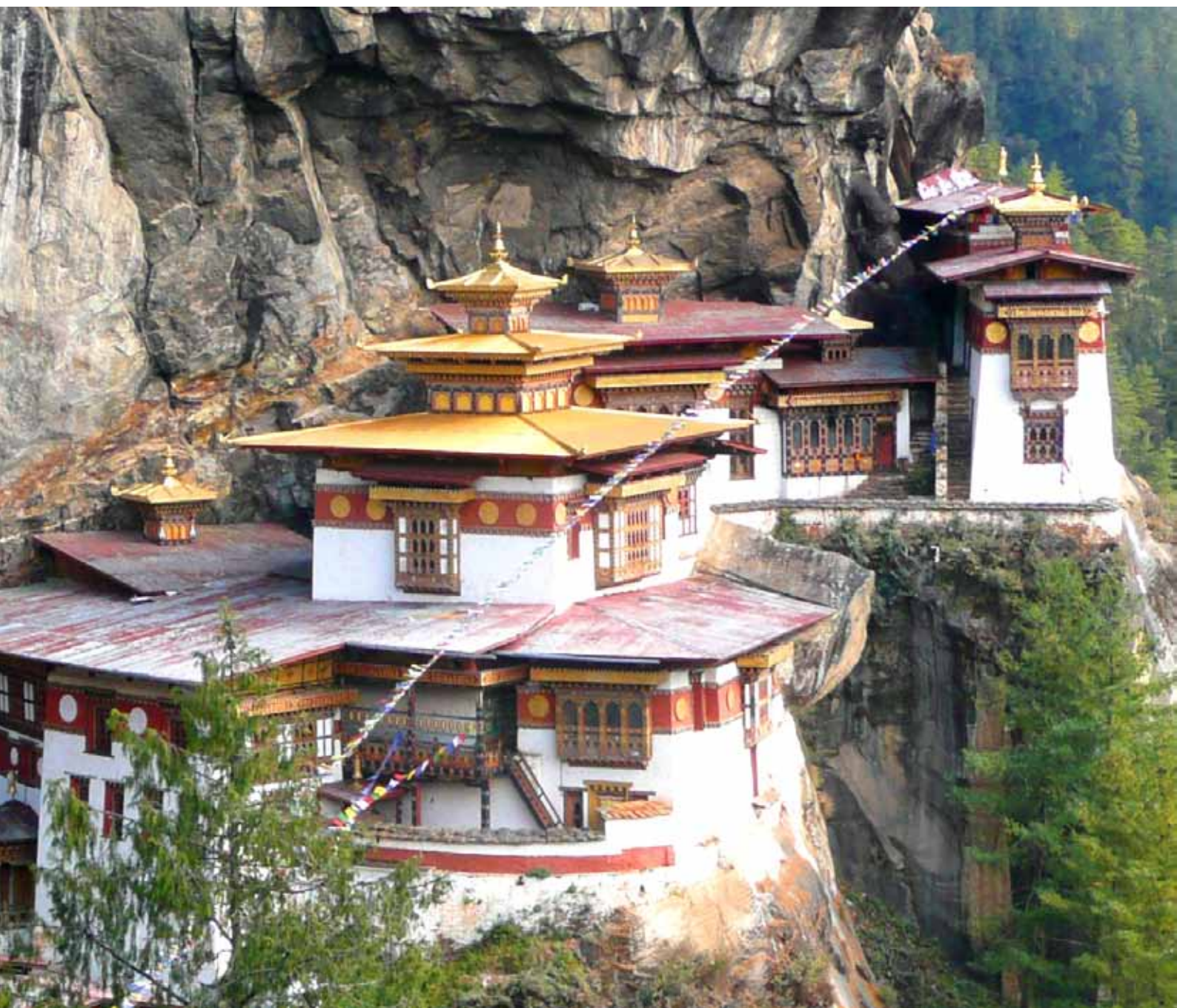
(Includes the Wangdue Festival)

Information and itinerary



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Introduction

Festival time in Bhutan is special.

If you are going to visit Bhutan and your dates are flexible, it makes sense to include a festival regardless of whatever else you choose to do.

The 2012 calendar falls nicely in Bhutan; it allows two festivals to be seen back to back.

The Wangdue Festival runs from 23 - 25 Sep followed by the Thimphu Festival 25 - 27 Sep.

The Thimphu Festival is probably the most well known, the biggest and best in Bhutan largely due to its location.

It commemorates the birth of Bhutan's patron saint Padmasambhava who introduced Buddhism to the Kingdom.

Each festival is spread over 3 days with the local people coming 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 Festivals take place in the huge Dzongs (Monastery) and takes the form of stories, played out by the masked dancers who have rehearsed for many weeks; it is a wonderful social occasion.

Whilst your trip will be focused on the Festivals, there is ample time to visit the other places and sights such as the massively impressive fortress like structure seen from the aircraft on the way in; Paro's Rinpung Dzong. It is still used and there are many monks that live there. In addition, just around the corner is the equally impressive Ta Dzong, the distinctive circular building that houses the National museum (both pictured below).

The day after your arrival in Bhutan, you will head straight for the capital city Thimphu before heading across the Doche La (Pass) and into the lush valley where both Punakha and Wangdu are located. This is the furthest east that you will travel.

There is plenty of time to see the area whilst experiencing the splendid Festival atmosphere. The Wangdu Festival will be a good warm up for the larger Thimphu counterpart.

At some point if you wish, there will be an opportunity to try a hot stone bath at a local farm (a local meal is also included) but be sure to talk to your Guide about this at an early stage and he can then work ahead to ensure that you are not disappointed. 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 swimming wear); you may only be there once!

When you return to Thimphu, there will be ample time to explore the remainder of this town as well as the Festival itself. Do not miss the view from the Radio Tower and the Takin Reserve where you can see this unique National animal or just stroll around the streets and see what you can find!

Bhutan's iconic Tigers Nest monastery awaits you when you return to Paro. Perched 900m up a cliff, this structure is a 90 min walk up the hillside but well worth it. Visit the high street, a school to see the children singing their National Anthem or just relax ready for your flight in the morning.

Details

Dates: 21 Sep - 28 Sep 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

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.

We are experienced in planning these trips; talk to us about your 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, 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 \$250 fee would apply to all assuming the group travelled in the appropriate months.

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 - Thimphu/Wangdue Festivals 2012

1 21 Sep, Arrive Paro

Met by your Guide at the airport; he will escort you throughout your time in Bhutan.

Transfer to your hotel in Paro and potentially sightsee Paro, which will include the imposing Rinpung Dzong, a huge Monastery that overlooks Paro and is typical of Bhutan.

Your Guide will brief you on the coming days.

2 22 Sep, Sightsee Paro, drive to Thimphu

You have plenty of time to sightsee the local town, the National Museum as well as the ancient Drukgyel Monastery (now a ruin). You should be able to see the Tigers Nest from the ground as you travel to Drukgyel.

Later in the day, drive to Thimphu.

Overnight Thimphu.

3 23 Sep, Drive to Punahka

The drive to Punahka takes 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 24 Sep, Wangdue Festival

Concentrate on the Wangdue Festival, which is just down the valley from Punahka.

It is a small Dzong by comparison to some but equally impressive.

Overnight Wangdue.

5 25 Sep, Drive to Thimphu, sightsee

Enjoy the drive back over the Doche La back into Thimphu.

You will get a good view into the Dzong as you drive down; this is the first day of the Festival.

Take this opportunity to see other parts of the capital such as the Radio Tower, the Takin Reserve, Craft shops and the twon itself.

Overnight Thimphu.

6 26 Sep, Thimphu

The Thimphu festival is one of the biggest events in the country. It takes place in the huge and impressive Thimphu Dzong.

Watch the colourful dances performed by Monks and lay people in their wonderful costumes. They have prepared for this festival for months.

Whilst this is potentially a full day, you can leave and return as you wish.

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!

7 27 Sep, Drive to Paro, trek to Tigers Nest

Drive back to Paro at your leisure in time for lunch.

After lunch, trek up to the iconic 'Tiger's Nest' (locally known as Taktshang). Make sure that you are adequately prepared footwear wise as it is a stiff 90 mins - 2hrs up and 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.

Overnight Paro.

8 28 Sep, 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. Paro and Thimphu both have medical facilities.

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 a client's insurance company approx £17,000 just to get the casualty 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).

