

PARO FESTIVAL TOUR

13 - 25 Mar 2011

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 (15th - 19th Mar 2011*), 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 (huge Monastery, pictured bottom left) 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 itinerary is stated in this document, there is a great deal of flexibility within it. You may visit some sights in a different order to that stated and indeed include some elements that are not stated at all.

Your trip will be focused on the Festival and the remaining elements will revolve around that.

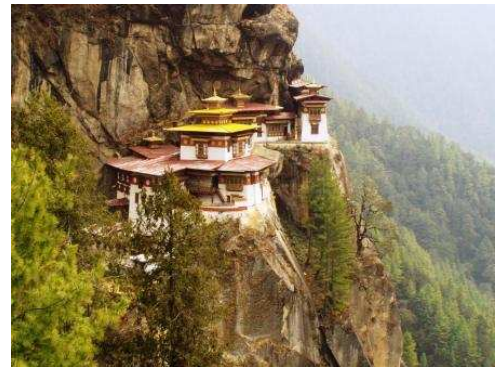
You will spend at least two nights in Paro, which is ample time to see the Festival in full flow and visit the other significant sights in this area, notably the National museum and the Tigers Nest Monastery.

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 Punakha/Wangdi. This valley is much warmer than Thimphu or Paro and has two more fantastic examples of Monasteries.

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 Tigers Nest Monastery (above) is an icon of Bhutan and these boys spend years training to be Monks.



Paro's Rinpung Dzong

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!

* These are the published dates of the Festival, based on the Lunar calendar. You will not need to attend all days and the final day (19th) is the unfurling of the enormous cloth Thangka painting. This takes place at night beginning at approx 2am. You can attend if you wish.

The Paro Festival Tour

This 7-night stay is enough time to explore western Bhutan, the superb monasteries (including the Tigers Nest), Dzongs, the traditional crafts, perhaps watch some archery, marvel at the Himalayan scenery and rural countryside as you drive from Paro to Thimphu. The whole trip also conveniently remains inside 2 weeks UK – UK.

This itinerary assumes that you use Kathmandu as a point of entry but you are free to use whichever access point you wish. This itinerary is also extremely flexible. It is possible that for whatever reason, you may choose to do some elements of it in a different order to that stated or indeed some additions such as a hot stone bath!

Days	Date	Event	Remarks
1	Sun 13th Mar	Depart London	
2	Mon 14th Mar	Arrive Kathmandu Transfer to hotel (25 mins) Evening free to explore Thamel	Travel and Trek is associated with three specific hotels, all perfectly placed in the heart of the buzzing Thamel district of the City. Arrangements can be made, including private transfers or you are free to make your own arrangements. 5* hotels can also be arranged. Why not dine in one of the many unique and exciting restaurants all within minutes of your hotel
3	Tue 15th Mar	Transfer to Kathmandu international airport for your flight to Bhutan Met by Travel and Trek Guide at the Paro airport on arrival. Transfer to hotel in Paro.	Superb Airbus flight on Druk Air, which will fly straight past Everest, Lohtse, Makalu and Kanchenjunga (4 of the biggest mountains in the world). Try to sit on the left side of the aircraft! Settle in to your hotel, you can discuss with your Guide what will happen over the coming days. Your Bhutanese guide will escort you throughout your time in Bhutan
4	Wed 16th Mar	Paro Festival	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.
5	Thu 17th Mar	Paro Festival, drive to Thimphu	The final act of any festival is the unfurling of the gigantic painting on one of the monastery walls. This takes place in the very early hours of the morning so you can choose whether to attend this or not. Once the festival is over, you will drive to Thimphu and spend the afternoon there exploring the city. Some of the many cultural sights that are available including traditional Thangka paintings, paper factory (hand made), craft making and a nunnery. Overnight Thimphu.
6	Fri 18th Mar	Explore Thimphu, onto Punakha/Wangdi	Continue to explore Thimphu with a visit to 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. You will then drive over the 3141m Doche La Pass and down into the town of Punakha. Overnight Punakha.
7	Sat 19th Mar	Explore Punakha and Wangdi Drive to Thimphu	Visit the Punakha Dzong and then drive across to Wangdi to see the Dzong there and/or the local market. Return to Thimphu. There is still plenty to see in this town and you may also wish to dine in a restaurant instead of the hotel. Overnight Thimphu.
8	Sun 20th Mar	Thimphu Drive to Paro	Complete any exploration of Thimphu before driving to Paro in the afternoon. Overnight Paro.
9	Mon 21st Mar	Paro	Excursion up to the Tiger's Nest Monastery. This imposing structure is a 90min – 2hr trek up hill. Well worth the effort.
10	Tue 22nd Mar	Fly to Kathmandu	
11	Wed 23rd Mar	Free day in Kathmandu	This day also acts as a spare in case of bad weather in Bhutan which may prevent the aircraft from leaving
12	Thu 24th Mar	Fly to UK	Morning departures will arrive UK same day, evening departures the following day.
13	Fri 25th Mar	Arrival in London	

Cost: \$1872, broken down as:

7 nights in Bhutan	\$1400 (assumes that there are a min of 3 in the group)
Return Druk Air flights, economy (KTM – PARO)	\$442 (current price)
Tourist Visa and Development fee	\$20 and \$10 respectively

Travel and Trek can assist you with accommodation and airport pick ups in Kathmandu and Delhi.

Summary of Inclusion and Exclusions:

Included:

- International return airfare into Bhutan from Kathmandu
- All hotel accommodation (good standard) on a twin share basis*
- All ground transport (from pick up at the airport to return to airport)
- All meals
- Mineral water (bottled) when out and about (ie not in hotels).
- The services of your Bhutanese Guide, full time.
- Fees to monuments, monasteries, etc...
- Tourist visa and Tourist Development fee

Not included:

- International flights from UK to the access city
- Accommodation/food/transport in your chosen access city. Travel and Trek will gladly organise your transit through Kathmandu and/or Delhi
- Local trek staff gratuities

* If you request sole occupation of a room, \$15 per night in Bhutan. If you are a sole traveller and do not request it and you are allocated a room on your own, there will be no charge.

For full details on getting to Bhutan, flight routes and Bhutan's pricing policy, please visit the 'Getting to Bhutan' webpage on the Travel and Trek website (the information is downloadable).

CONTACT DETAILS

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