

## THIMPHU FESTIVAL TOUR

14 - 25 Sep 2010

**The Thimphu Festival** is probably the most well known, 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.

Spread over 3 days (17–19th Sep 2010), 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 a huge Dzong (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.

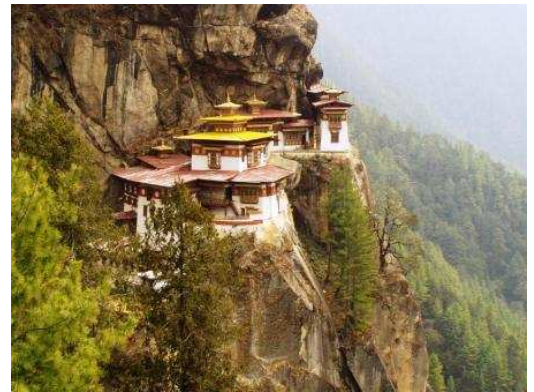
Whilst your trip will be focused on the Festival, there is ample time to visit the other places and sights such as the massively impressive fortress like structure seen from the aircraft on the way in; Paro's Rinpung Dzong. It is still used and there are many monks that live there. In addition, just 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 and settle in there before possibly seeing some of the Festival that afternoon. You have the entire following day to soak up the atmosphere and experience this event.

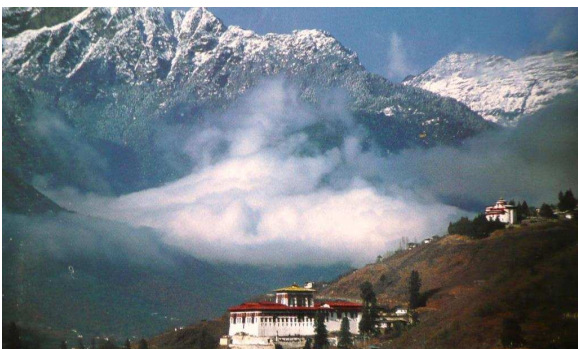
Having spent two nights in Thimphu, it will be time to head over the high Doche La (Pass) and down into Punakha and Wangdi. There are two equally stunning Dzongs here and also a local market (Wangdi). You will spend a night in one of these towns.

At some point, 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. 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!



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



*Paro's Rinpung Dzong (bottom centre), overlooked by the smaller Ta Dzong (now the National museum).*

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.

## The Thimphu 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    | Tue 14 Sep | <b>Depart London</b>   |   |
| 2    | Wed 15 Sep | <b>Arrive Kathmandu</b><br>Transfer to hotel (25 mins)<br><br>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.<br><br>Why not dine in one of the many unique and exciting restaurants all within minutes of your hotel                    |
| 3    | Thu 16 Sep | Transfer to Kathmandu international airport for your <b>flight to Bhutan</b><br><br>Met by Travel and Trek Guide at the airport<br><br>Transfer to hotel in Paro, sightsee 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 and sit on the left side of the aircraft!<br><br>This will include the imposing <b>Rinpung Dzong</b> , a huge Monastery that overlooks Paro and is typical of Bhutan.<br><br>Your Bhutanese guide will escort you throughout your time in Bhutan |
| 4    | Fri 17 Sep | <b>Drive to Thimphu Festival</b>   | A leisurely morning drive to Thimphu, settle in to your hotel before heading off to the Festival in the Dzong. Your Guide will advise you on the timings. You may choose to include other activities today also.<br><br>Don't miss the Takin reserve; the Takin is Bhutan's National animal and is unique to Bhutan.  |
| 5    | Sat 18 Sep | <b>Thimphu Festival</b>  | All day to experience Thimphu's biggest and most spectacular event of the year. This is Bhutan at its colourful best; lots of people dancing and entertaining.  |
| 6    | Sun 19 Sep | <b>Thimphu Festival Drive to Punakha</b>   | You may choose to witness the unfurling of the huge Thangka painting (very early morning).<br><br>Drive over the 3000m Doche La (Pass) and down into the Punakha/Wangdi area. Visit the impressive Punakha Dzong.   |
| 7    | Mon 20 Sep | <b>Punakha/Wangdi</b>  | Explore this area, which climatically is different to Paro and Thimphu (it is warmer!). There is a local market in Wangdi.<br><br>Drive back across the Pass and into Thimphu. Overnight Thimphu.   |
| 8    | Tue 21 Sep | <b>Thimphu</b>   | Explore the parts of Thimphu that were perhaps unable to do whilst the Festival was on going.<br><br>Overnight Thimphu.   |
| 9    | Wed 22 Sep | <b>Paro</b>  | Drive to Paro and visit the town as well as the Tigers Nest . This imposing structure is a 90min – 2hr trek up hill. Well worth the effort.   |
| 10   | Thu 23 Sep | <b>Fly to Kathmandu</b>  | Morning flight back to Kathmandu.   |
| 11   | Fri 24 Sep | <b>Free day in Kathmandu</b>   | This day also acts as a spare in case of bad weather in Bhutan which may prevent the aircraft from leaving  |
| 12   | Sat 25 Sep | <b>Fly to UK</b>   | Morning departures will arrive UK same day, evening departures the following day.   |
| 13   | Sun 26 Sep | <b>Arrival in London</b>   |   |

**Cost:** \$1862, 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                                  | \$20  |

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 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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