

Bhutan Discovery: Culture, Cranes & the Himalayan Trail

07 Days / 06 Nights

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Journey deeper into the heart of the Himalayas with this seven-day exploration, crafted by Karmaia Adventures. This immersive itinerary goes beyond the classic trail to include the pristine and protected Phobjikha Valley, the winter home of the endangered black-necked cranes. Experience the beautiful contrast of Bhutan, from the vibrant culture of its capital and the sub-tropical warmth of Punakha to the remote, high-altitude serenity of Gangtey. This journey is a perfect blend of profound spirituality, breathtaking natural beauty, and authentic encounters, culminating in the legendary pilgrimage to the Tiger's Nest Monastery.

TRIP OVERVIEW

Duration: 07 Days / 06 Nights

Location: Thimphu, Punakha, Phobjikha & Paro

Difficulty: Moderate (one challenging day: Tiger's Nest hike; other days involve light walks and scenic drives)

Max Elevation: Phobjikha (2,900 m)

Best Season: Spring (Mar–May) and Autumn (Sep–Nov); Winter (Dec–Feb) for crane spotting

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Embark on a Pilgrimage to the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery (Paro Taktsang), perched on a sheer cliff face.
- Discover a Hidden Valley in Phobjikha, a protected sanctuary for the rare Black-Necked Cranes.
- Cross the Scenic Dochula Pass, walking among its 108 memorial stupas with panoramic Himalayan views.

- Explore Magnificent Dzongs, including the majestic Punakha Dzong and the imposing Tashichho Dzong.
- Immerse in Local Culture at the Thimphu Weekend Market, a traditional nunnery, and the ancient Rinchengang Village.
- Seek Blessings at sacred temples like the Chimi Lhakhang (Fertility Temple) and the ancient Kyichu Lhakhang.

OUTLINE ITINERARY

- Day 1: Arrive in Paro and transfer to Thimphu; enjoy a scenic flight and visit Memorial Chorten, Buddha Dordenma, and Tashichho Dzong.
- Day 2: Travel from Thimphu to Punakha via Dochula Pass; explore the Weekend Market, Arts & Crafts School, Chimi Lhakhang, and enjoy views from Dochula Pass.
- Day 3: Discover Punakha with visits to Punakha Dzong, a riverside hike, and Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten.
- Day 4: Journey from Punakha to Phobjikha Valley; hike through Rinchengang Village, visit Gangtey Gompa, and walk the Phobjikha Nature Trail.
- Day 5: Travel from Phobjikha to Paro; enjoy a morning valley walk, scenic drive, visit Paro Dzong, and explore Paro Old Town.
- Day 6: Explore Paro with a hike to Tiger's Nest Monastery, visit Kyichu Lhakhang, and end the day with a farewell dinner.
- Day 7: Departure; transfer to Paro Airport.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Physical Challenge:** Moderate overall. Tiger's Nest is the main uphill challenge (2-3 hours). Other days include gentle walks, a downhill nature trail in Phobjikha, and easy village hikes.
- **Accommodation:** Comfortable 3-star hotels in major towns. In Phobjikha, expect simpler but clean 2-star lodgings with an authentic valley feel.

- **Food:** Full-board meals with authentic Bhutanese dishes, plus Indian and continental options served in hotels and local eateries.
- **Weather:** Variable. Layering is essential. Spring/Autumn are mild (10–20°C); Phobjikha is cooler. Winter is sunny but cold, especially at night. Summer

Detailed Itinerary

Day 01: Arrival in the Himalayas – Welcome to Thimphu

Your adventure begins with one of the world's most spectacular flights into Paro, offering jaw-dropping views of the Himalayas. Upon arrival, your Karmaia Adventures guide will welcome you to the Land of the Thunder Dragon and escort you to the capital, Thimphu. After lunch, we begin our cultural immersion with a visit to the revered Memorial Chorten. We then proceed to the Changangkha Lhakhang, an ancient temple overlooking the valley, and observe the unique Takin at its enclosure. Later, witness the grandeur of the giant Buddha Dordenma statue. As evening falls, we visit the magnificent Tashichho Dzong, the seat of Bhutan's government.

Overnight: Thimphu | Altitude: 2,300m

Day 02: Markets, Monasteries & the Pass to Punakha

Immerse yourself in the vibrant colors and sounds of the Thimphu Weekend Market (applicable Fri-Sun). We then delve into Bhutan's living heritage with visits to the Traditional Handmade Paper Mill and the School of Arts and Crafts. Step back in time at the Folk Heritage Museum and explore sacred texts at the National Library. The spiritual heart of the morning is a visit to the Dechenphodrang Monastic School and the Zilukha Nunnery. After lunch, we journey east, ascending to the Dochula Pass (3,200m). Walk among the 108 Druk Wangyel Stupas and, weather permitting, enjoy a breathtaking Himalayan panorama. Descending into the Punakha Valley, we take a gentle hike through rice fields to the famous Chimi Lhakhang, the Temple of Fertility.

Overnight: Punakha | Altitude: 1,350m

Day 03: Punakha's Fortress and Riverside Trails

Today is dedicated to the majestic Punakha Dzong, arguably Bhutan's most beautiful fortress, situated at the confluence of two rivers. For the active traveler, we offer a beautiful half-day hike starting above the Dzong, offering stunning valley views and ending with a crossing of a new suspension bridge. Alternatively, you can relax or opt for an hour-long hike (uphill) to the serene Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, which offers a spectacular, elevated view of the winding river and paddies below.

Overnight: Punakha

Day 04: Journey to the Crane Valley – Phobjikha

This morning, we drive to the remote and beautiful Phobjikha Valley. En route, we stop for a short but rewarding hike to the ancient Rinchengang Village, a community known for preserving its traditional way of life. Upon arrival in Phobjikha, a protected conservation area, you'll feel the serene atmosphere of this high-altitude valley. We will embark on the famous Gangtey Nature Trail (approx. 2.5 hours), a gentle walk that descends from the Gangtey Gompa monastery through forests and meadows, offering breathtaking views of the entire valley below—a winter home to the endangered black-necked cranes.

Overnight: Phobjikha | Altitude: 2,900m

Day 05: Valley Mornings and Return to Paro

Enjoy a peaceful morning in Phobjikha; perhaps take a walk to observe local life, including children on their long walk to school. After breakfast, we begin our scenic drive back to the Paro Valley. Upon arrival, we visit the impressive Rinpung Dzong (Paro Dzong) and cross its ancient wooden bridge. The afternoon is for exploring the charming Old Paro Town, where you can browse local handicraft shops and may witness a thrilling match of traditional archery.

Overnight: Paro | Altitude: 2,200m

Day 06: The Crown Jewel – Hike to Tiger's Nest

Today is dedicated to one of Bhutan's most sacred sites: the Tiger's Nest Monastery (Paro Taktsang). We begin early with a drive to the trailhead. The 2-3 hour hike uphill is a rewarding pilgrimage through pine forests, with ever-improving views of the monastery clinging to a sheer cliff face. The spiritual energy of this site is a profound culmination of your journey. After exploring the monastery, we descend. If energy permits, we visit the Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the oldest temples in Bhutan. In the evening, we gather for a special farewell dinner.

Overnight: Paro

Day 07: Farewell and Departure

Enjoy a final breakfast in the serene Bhutanese morning. Your Karmaia Adventures guide will accompany you to Paro International Airport, assisting with your departure and bidding you a heartfelt farewell as you board your flight, carrying with you the timeless memories of your Himalayan discovery. "Bhutan Discovery Tour: 7 Days in the Land of the Thunder Dragon"

