

# Bhutan 11 Day - Cultural & Festival Tour



*Opened for tourism in the mid 1970s, even now fewer travellers visit Bhutan than visit Antarctica.*

## **Bhutan tour highlights**

- Ecological heart of Eastern Himalaya
  - Mountains, monasteries and magic
  - Treasure house of Buddhist culture
    - Amazing unique festival
- Experienced attentive guides & hosts
- Maximum of twelve people on each tour.

## **tour dates**

**Tour dates:** 30 March to 9 April 2020

## **tour cost**

**Tour Cost:** NZD\$8,500  
**Deposit Required:** NZD\$4,000

*Bangkok Thailand to Bangkok Thailand:*

## **options & supplements**

**Single Supplement:** NZD\$2,500

## **custom groups:**

Talk to us about custom groups



Helen with some young admirers



Hamish thanking his Tigers Nest monastery taxi

In late September / early October of 2018 Helen, Hamish and Wanda from Tuatara Tours visited Bhutan on a reconnaissance tour to this mysterious part of the world.



## **Bhutan**

### **Visit the World's Only Carbon-Negative Country**

This Buddhist nation is the only country in the world to have a negative carbon footprint and in 2016 was rated the "least corrupt country in the world".

Perched high on the mighty Himalayan range, the Kingdom of Bhutan has defied globalization and chosen to remain a hidden paradise. This is a place that even seasoned travelers consider a privilege to visit. Bhutan, unlike its other Himalayan neighbors, considers all creation sacred, including trees, mountains, rivers, and lakes. Consequently, Himalayan species near extinction in the bordering countries of Nepal, India, and Tibet are doing well in Bhutan.

Bhutan is also the last bastion of vajrayana Buddhism, a spiritual practice that is known to be one of the most profound schools of teaching in the Buddhist world. The sacred monasteries, the fluttering prayer flags that line the high ridges, the red robed monks chanting their prayers -- all give this kingdom an aura of another time. This is BHUTAN: Known to its inhabitants as Druk Yul -- "the Land of the Thunder Dragon.

### **Paro Festival (Tsechu)**

Paro Tsechu is one of the most popular festivals in Bhutan. Featuring dances performed by trained monks and laymen in amazing masks and costumes, Tsechus (festivals) are one of the best ways to experience the ancient living culture of Bhutan.

A Tsechu is a Buddhist festival in honour of Guru Rimpoche, the saint who brought Buddhism to Bhutan.

A highlight of the Paro Tsechu is the unfurling of the silk Thangka -- so large it covers the face of an entire building and is considered one of the most sacred blessings in the whole of Bhutan. The 'Thangka, known in Bhutan as a 'thongdroel' is a religious picture scroll, and is only exhibited for a few hours at daybreak on the final day of the festival enabling the people to obtain its blessing.

This holy scroll "confers liberation by the mere sight of it" (the meaning of the word 'thongdroel' in Bhutanese).



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## Your tour hosts



Bhutanese schoolgirl in school uniform with Helen, Hamish and Wanda on the riverbank overlooking the Punakha Dzong (fortress)  
October of 2018

Tuatara staff have sought out magical places for you to visit and will accompany you and local guides on an 11 day Cultural and Festival Tour of Bhutan.

Either Helen or Wanda will accompany you on your tour as a tour host. We employ local English speaking Bhutanese guides and drivers so Helen and Wanda are more hosts than guides and will ensure the smooth operation of your experience whilst in Bhutan.

### Wanda Vivequin



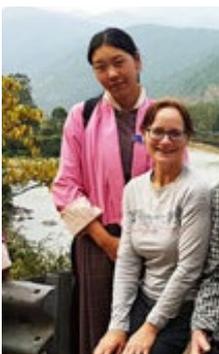
Wanda is a Christchurch-based guide who has spent the last 20 years sharing her favourite places in Nepal, Bhutan and New Zealand with guests.

She began guiding in Bhutan in 2009 and has visited this incredible Himalayan Kingdom 5 times since then taking small groups of people to off the beaten track valleys and communities.



Wanda and our Bhutanese guide Rabgay in the courtyard of one of the many monasteries we visit

### Helen O'Dowd



Helen has a background in the travel industry. In 2017 she joined Tuatara Tours as a guide and has guided numerous walking and biking tours in New Zealand.

Helen went to Bhutan in 2018 on our reconnaissance trip and was fascinated by this mysterious country and can't wait to accompany her next tour to Bhutan.



Helen with a friend



# Bhutan 11 Day - Cultural & Festival Tour



Interested roadside spectators



Buddha Point statue - Bronze Buddha 54 metres high



Helen being dressed in the Bhutan national dress (Kira) at our hotel in Thimphu



Our guide Rabgay preparing a Bhutanese snack - cucumber, delicious and refreshing

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## **what's included**

### **Guides**

You will be accompanied by a New Zealand guide (host) who is experienced in travel to Bhutan. Your host will be with you from the time you leave Bangkok until you arrive back in Bangkok where your tour will end.

We will also have a fully accredited Bhutanese English speaking guide for the duration of the tour. Our guide is very well versed and qualified to comment on all that is Bhutanese. Our driver is also accredited by the Bhutanese government.

### **Visas**

You will require a visa for Bhutan. Please talk to us at the time of booking as we arrange your Bhutan visa which is included in the tour cost.

### **Transport**

**Your flights from Bangkok to Paro and Paro to Bangkok are included in the cost of the tour.**

On arrival in Paro you will be met by our Bhutanese Government accredited guide and driver. You will be travelling in a well appointed small bus with very comfortable seating.

### **Accommodation**

**We stay in modern 3 to 4 star hotels or resorts all the way.**

Hotels in Bhutan are of a good standard and are comparable with hotels in more developed western countries. They are clean and tidy with modern facilities throughout. Rooms are double/ twin with ensuite facilities. All rooms have coffee and tea making facilities. You will receive more comprehensive details of the accommodation on your tour at time of booking. Your pre tour accommodation in Bangkok is included in the tour cost. **Any post tour accommodation is not included in the tour cost.**

### **Food**

**All meals are included with the cost of your tour in Bhutan.** No meals are included in the tour cost whilst in Thailand pre and post tour.

Generally meals in Bhutan are buffet style and taken in your hotel or guesthouse. Breakfast, lunches and dinners will generally include a selection of western, Chinese or Indian style dishes, with some local specialties on occasion.

Don't forget to try the national dishes of emma datshe (chilli and cheese) and delicious red rice. Rice and vegetable dishes are always present for every meal.

Vegetarians are well catered for and meat is the exception rather than the rule with most meals. Alcoholic drinks are not included with meals and are paid for separately. Filtered or bottled water is usually freely available in most hotels restaurants and in the vehicle you will be travelling in.

Each meal will typically have three or four dishes to share. Choices are limited and feedback has suggested that the food isn't the main reason to visit Bhutan. Meals may become a little monotonous with similar offerings at a lot of the restaurants.

Please don't be offended that your guide and driver do not eat with you. This is the custom in Bhutan and guides and drivers generally eat together in another section of the restaurant.

### **Entry Fees**

All entry fees to monasteries and other attractions when accompanied by our local guide.





**More about the Paro Festival**



A lot of local people arrive at the venue in their finest attire and jewellery of coral and turquoise and take part in the festivities and consume butter tea and strong barley alcohol as a part of the merriment. People coming here usually pack picnic lunches in their traditional bamboo baskets and stay all day at the festival.

Attending this festival is a huge affair for the Bhutanese as they consider it a blessing to be able to watch the dances that takes place once in a year. The Tsechus are a rich form of oral history tradition, where the values and religious beliefs of ancestors are passed on to the present day people through the dance & dramas.

The beautiful mask dance, performed by the monks in Bhutan is highly appreciated by millions of people from all over the world. So, get ready to observe Bhutan's most popular annual event...let the enchanting dance forms, vibrant costumes, and wonderful performers take you all by surprise.



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## itinerary

**Day Pre Tour - 29 March, 2020**

**Bangkok - Novotel hotel at Suvarnabhumi Airport**

Meet in Bangkok at Novotel Bangkok International Airport (Suvarnabhumi Airport) This evening at 5pm we meet in the bar at the Novotel attached to Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok where we get to know members of our group over a few drinks and nibbles. We go over timings for the morning departure to Paro, Bhutan the next day. Please make sure you arrive into Bangkok in time to make this meeting as we plan to go over important details for the trip. Your accommodation tonight is covered on a twin share/room only basis overnight Bangkok on room only basis

**Day 1 - 30 March**

**Bangkok - Paro (2200m) overnight in Thimphu**

Today we make the 4 hour flight to Paro and then drive on to Thimphu (about one hour drive) which will be our base for two nights.

Depending on the arrival time of our flight, this afternoon we will sightsee around Thimphu including a visit to the stunning Buddha Dordenma Statue, made of bronze and gilded in gold and is 51 metres high and Thimphu Dzong in the early evening as it is lit up like a fairytale. Thimphu is the capital of Bhutan, but, its laid back feeling and easy going way of life makes it a great place to get acquainted with the country

We overnight at 3-4 star hotel in Thimphu - to be confirmed

Lunch and dinner are covered in the cost.

**Day 2 - 31 March**

**Thimphu (2334m)**

We depart after breakfast to visit the National Takin Preserve to acquaint ourselves with the odd looking national animal of Bhutan - half goat and half cow. Morning is the best time to visit as the animals are more active. We then travel about 40 minutes (with stops) to the base of beautiful Cheri Monastery. We will then walk to the monastery and enjoy time our time walking around this idyllic spot. After descending we eat a picnic lunch next to the river and may share a few moments with local pilgrims and families also visiting the site. Breakfast, lunch and dinner all covered.

**Day 3 - 1 April**

**Thimphu (2334m) - Punakha (1242m)**

We offer you a free morning and the chance to stroll around Thimphu at your leisure. At 11:00am we head out of the city for the Dochula pass Alt:10142ft /3091m. This pass offers panoramic views of the Himalayan mountain ranges. The hill above the chorten is covered with prayer flags and it forms part of the royal botanical garden. We lunch at a restaurant on the summit and then wind our way down to the lower elevations of the Punakha Valley. Time permitting we will walk to Chimi Lhakang - the temple of the Divine Madman Drukpa Kinley. Overnight Punkaha - Breakfast, lunch and dinner covered



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# **Bhutan**

## **11 Day - Cultural & Festival Tour**



Punakha Dzong (fortress)

***our team is here to provide the best experience***

We only have one world and we have to share it with each other. Much of the attraction for our clients is to experience unspoiled and un-crowded landscapes. It is our challenge to ensure that in this sharing of the experience, we minimise where possible, the impact of our business.

Through the introduction of strict environmental guidelines, we minimise our impact on the environment we live and work in.



Typical meal

### **Day 4 - 2 April** **Punakha (1242m)**

In the morning we visit Punakha Dzong (palace of glorious happiness) built in between Pho Chu and MoChu (male & female rivers) the old capital and the winter palace of Jeo Khenpo, the country's religious head. After visiting the dzong we head further up the valley for a picnic and visit the beautiful Khamsum Yuelley Namgayl Chorten reached via a one and a half hour walk. Overnight Punakha - Breakfast, lunch and dinner covered

### **Day 5 - 3 April** **Punakha (1242m) - Gangtey (3000m)**

We have a leisurely start and then make the 2- 3 hour drive to Gangtey/black neck crane valley. This valley is the winter home for black necked cranes and is also a wonderful place to enjoy the experience of rural Bhutanese life. We drive through Lawala pass which is part of the Black Mountain range and represents the boundary between west and east Bhutan. We make a visit to the Gangtey Monastery and the Black Neck Crane visitor centre this afternoon Overnight Phobjika - breakfast, lunch and dinner provided

### **Day 6 - 4 April** **Gangtey (3000m)**

Today with a picnic lunch we venture into the Gangtey Valley for day hike. There are plenty of wonderful walks to choose from in Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park and we select one that gives us a great appreciation of this beautiful landscape. Today could also be a great opportunity to try out a famous Bhutanese hot stone bath. Overnight Gangtey - breakfast, lunch and dinner provided

### **Day 7 - 5 April** **Gangtey (3000m) to Haa Valley (2670m)**

Haa overnight - driving day. Today is a driving day as we retrace our steps towards Thimpu and then on to Paro and over to the stunning Haa Valley, and in the process crossing over the highest motorable road in Bhutan. We overnight at a gorgeous restored farmhouse called Soenem Dzingka Heritage Lodge. It is clean, cozy and more than very comfortable. It is a restored family home and you will love it. We arrive by about 4pm and can take a late afternoon stroll in the countryside straight out of the door of the lodge. Overnight Haa Breakfast, lunch and dinner provided

### **Day 8 - 6 April** **Haa Valley (2670m)**

After yesterday's driving we spend today exploring the Haa Valley and Haa town. There are so many options here and we will cater to everyone's needs with short/ medium or longer walks and excursions. The lodge is simply spectacular and hospitable, a favourite of ours. A hot stone bath is also on offer here. Haa Valley - Breakfast, lunch and dinner provided.





Helen and Wanda at the Dochu La Pass standing amongst its 108 chortens (buddhist monuments)

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## **What will the weather be like?**

The best time to visit Bhutan is generally considered to be either in the spring, between March and May, or in the autumn from September to November. During these months the weather tends to be pleasantly dry and mild, and the scenery - never less than beautiful, of course - is at its most glorious.

Bhutan's spring is fairly short, usually lasting from early March to mid-April, when the summer rains get underway. Temperatures are mild, and melting snows give way to gorgeous wildflowers covering the hillsides, while both humidity and rainfall are low.

But what really recommends a spring holiday in Bhutan is the clarity of the views. You can expect some absolutely stunning Himalayan panoramas at high elevations.

### **Day 9 - 7 April Haa Valley (2670m) – Paro (2200m)**

We leave Haa Valley and drive back via a scenic route back to Paro in time to take part in the incredible Paro Festival for the afternoon. This is one of the highlights in the Bhutanese cultural calendar and you won't be disappointed. It is a visual display of song, dance, family gathering and joyous celebration. We overnight at the 4 star Naksel Resort - your home for two nights. Breakfast, lunch and dinner provided

### **Day 10 - 8 April Paro (2200m)**

This morning after a hearty breakfast we hike to the famous Tiger's Nest. Those of you not up for the hike can rent a pony to take you up to the restaurant. We return to the bus where we have lunch and then head back to the festival grounds for more people watching and celebrating. A great way to finish our journey in Bhutan. We celebrate our final dinner with our staff. Overnight Paro, Breakfast, lunch and dinner provided.

### **Day 11 - 9 April Paro - Bangkok**

Depending on our flight time back to Bangkok we will have either a leisurely or early start to the day.

We board the flight for the spectacular journey back to Thailand where the trip concludes at Suvarnabhumi Airport. Breakfast provided.

**No accommodation post tour is included in the tour cost. We can help you book accommodation in Bangkok if you have to overnight before catching a flight onwards.**



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Terraced rice fields just prior to harvest



Prayer wheels



National animal - the takin



Monastery decorations



Thimpu Dzong



## **fitness**

A reasonable level of fitness is required to enjoy this trip. Many monasteries in Bhutan are reached by long flights of steps. At times you will be at altitudes of up to 3000m, which can affect even the fittest traveller, so be prepared to be a little breathless.

## **clothes & luggage**

We provide a comprehensive list of gear for you in the tour trip notes (sent to you on completion of the booking process.)

A medium size suitcase is sufficient for all your requirements, and ideally on wheels so that it can be pulled along.

You must be careful of the weight of your luggage and limit it to 15kgs ----- 20kgs at the very maximum.

## **travel insurance**

Travel insurance is compulsory.

We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation.

We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects.

We require evidence that you have travel insurance and the insurance company's 24 hour emergency contact number has been provided to Tuatara Tours.

**We recommend that you take out insurance at the time of booking to protect your trip payment in the case that you may have to cancel your tour.**

If you have credit card insurance we will require details of the participating insurer/underwriter, the level of coverage, policy number and emergency contact number rather than the bank's name and credit card details.



Young monks

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## **trip grading**

To determine the grade of a particular adventure we consider a number of factors.

These include the condition of the terrain, the altitude, the number of pass crossings and the length of the trip.

The **11 Day - Cultural & Festival Tour** is graded Mild: An average level of fitness, Walk 10km, on formed tracks and roads with some average to steep inclines at times.

The walk to the Tigers Nest Monastery is optional: it is an uphill walk of approximately 3 hours.

There is the option of taking a pony up to the tea house which is two thirds of the way up to the monastery. (extra cost)

We also include non walking options on this tour.

## **adventure travel**

By its very nature adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected. To get the most out of your adventure it is important that you are mentally flexible, positive and eager to take on all the challenges that arise.

If you are uncertain about your suitability for this tour, speak with us and we can help guide you in the right direction

## **pre and post tour accommodation and meals**

Pre tour accommodation (29th March 2020) is included in the tour cost. Meals -dinner on the 29th of March and breakfast on the 30th of March are at your own cost.

If you would like some help booking post tour accommodation (cost not included in the tour cost) in Bangkok we can help you with that.

## **Contact us at**

- ▶ New Zealand: 0800 377 378
- ▶ Australia: 1 800 044 633
- ▶ World: +64 3 962 3280
- ▶ Email: [info@tuataratours.co.nz](mailto:info@tuataratours.co.nz)
- ▶ Web: [www.tuataratours.co.nz](http://www.tuataratours.co.nz)

## **what's not included**

- International flights from your home to Bangkok and from Bangkok to your home.
- post tour accommodation. Meals - dinner on the 29th of March and breakfast on the 30th of March are at your own cost.
- personal expenses
- tips



2 times 4 legged traffic



Peppers



Green fields



# Bhutan

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### country information

Every country has its own charm and its own set of problems. Nothing and no-one is perfect but one can only try and get as close to perfect as possible.

This tiny country which is smaller in area than the majority of Indian states is setting an amazing example of living life in the best way possible. It is still mostly untouched and unharmed by human intervention.

Life in this land is calm, peaceful and surrounded by natural beauty, exactly how it is meant to be.

### A few facts about Bhutan

1. Bhutan provides free education and healthcare facilities to not only its residents, but also tourists.
2. Bhutan is the only country that consumes more carbon dioxide than it gives out.
3. Around 70% of the total land is covered with forest in Bhutan.
4. Bhutan is also the only nation that follows the policy of gross national happiness and not the traditional gross national product.
5. It is the happiest country in Asia and probably in the world. Quite an achievement.
6. Bhutan banned the use of tobacco completely in the year 2007.
7. Its capital Thimphu is free of traffic lights.
8. It is the largest exporter of renewable energy in the world.
9. It has banned the use of plastic bags since 1999.
10. The king and queen of Bhutan celebrated the birth of their first child by planting around 108,000 tree saplings.
11. It also has a world record of planting about 49,672 trees in just an hour.
12. It is also the only country in the world that grows its food organically. Bhutan has banned the use of pesticides and other chemicals in agriculture.
13. It is one of the greenest countries in the world.
14. Citizens of the country have constitutional obligations to protect the environment.
15. Simplicity is the policy that every Bhutanese individual breathes and lives.

If all the countries followed Bhutan, our world would be a better place!



Layap girl



Local milking shed on the side of the road



Typical truck - they are all unique and highly decorated

### Tuatara Conservation

Tuatara Tours are proud to be actively involved in Tuatara Conservation in New Zealand.

Tuatara Tours has formally adopted "BP" a male juvenile tuatara who resides at Orana Park in Christchurch and is part of the conservation programme to ensure the safe future of these amazing reptiles





GNH - Gross National Happiness  
Something you will experience

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Go to [www.tuataratours.co.nz](http://www.tuataratours.co.nz), click the enquiry button and submit your booking request using the form provided.

We enjoy talking to people about their travel interests. So feel free to contact us directly if you'd rather not fill out a form.

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- ▶ Web: [www.tuataratours.co.nz](http://www.tuataratours.co.nz)



These are not dreadlocks, it is a traditional hat made from yak hair, the tassels actually drain the rain away from the head and face.



Helen, Wanda and guides on the trek up to the Tigers Nest monastery. The monastery is on the cliff face behind them.



# BHUTAN



Bhutan Festival & Cultural Tour

## 11 Days

Tours Start in Bangkok  
Finish in Bangkok

Maximum 12 people

