

Temple Trails & Homestays in Bhutan with Dechenphu Tsechu

A collection of beautiful day walks in more remote valleys, several nights spent in traditional village houses and a two-day trek across the Saga La Pass.



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Walking
Accommodation	Hotels, Homestay, Deluxe Camp
Grade	Gentle / Moderate
Duration	15 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	Walks on: 7 days On trek: 2 days
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Leader Bhutan
Land only	Joining in Kathmandu, Nepal
Max altitude	3,990m/13,090ft, Chele La Pass, Day 8

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



tel: +44 (0)1453 844400 fax: +44 (0)1453 844422 info@mountainkingdoms.com www.mountainkingdoms.com

Departures

Group departures

2025 Dates:

Mon 31 Mar - Mon 14 Apr With Talo Tsechu

Sun 26 Oct - Sun 09 Nov With Dechenphu Tsechu

This is the detailed itinerary for our October departure only. A separate itinerary for our March departure can be downloaded from the Mountain Kingdoms website or requested from our office.

Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 4 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday. If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

Your guide



You will have an English-speaking Bhutanese guide to lead your trip. Mountain Kingdoms have been working with the same partner in Bhutan since 1986 and their guides are some of the best in the Kingdom. They speak good English, as this is taught in all Bhutanese schools, and are fully qualified guides. The Tourism Authority of Bhutan insists that a Bhutanese trek or tour leader must pass his/her guiding exams in Thimphu before accompanying groups of foreign visitors.

Your trip highlights

- Get first-hand insight into Bhutanese culture, traditions, legends and way of life. Meet and mix with Bhutanese people.
- Attend a Tibetan Buddhist festival.
- Enjoy many interesting day walks, including Tiger's Nest Monastery.
- Visit beautiful off-the-beaten-track valleys.
- Stay in handpicked homestays, good quality hotels and a deluxe camp on trek.
- Trek for two days over the Saga La Pass to Drugyel Dzong in the Paro Valley.

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-2	Fly to Kathmandu. At leisure.
Day 3	Fly to Bhutan. Sightseeing including Paro Dzong and the National Museum.
Day 4	Walk via two 'long life' temples to Kyichu Lhakhang. Drive to Thimphu, visit Tamchhog Lhakang en route.
Day 5	Sightseeing in Thimphu and a walk to Dechen Phodrang. Visit Bhutan's seat of government, the Tashishhodzong.
Day 6	Attend the Dechenphu Tsechu.
Days 7-8	Drive to Punakha over the Dochu La pass. Walk from Punakha Dzong to Samdingkha. Walk in the Jibjokha Valley overnight in homestays.
Day 9	Drive to Haa valley via Chele La Pass. Walk to visit Kila Nunnery. Walk to Yangtong village and visit Haa Dzong. Homestay in the Haa Valley.
Days 10-11	Trek over the Saga La Pass and descend to Drugyel Dzong. Deluxe camp for the night. Walk to Tiger's Nest temple.
Days 12-15	Fly to Kathmandu. Time at leisure. Fly to London.

Trip summary



Our avowed aim with this holiday is to show you rural Bhutan in depth, as well as take you on inventive day walks to some of the major sights. In the ten days you will be in Bhutan we will show you the little known, but wonderfully beautiful, Pho Chu river valley at Punakha, and the Haa valley west of Paro. Few people visit these two valleys but there are charming villages, hamlets, terraced farmland, forests, and cliff temples to discover. You will also stroll on lovely day walks we have researched over the years, to enjoy views of the Himalaya, have picnics and get off-grid. And, as a final flourish, there is an exciting overnight trek crossing the high Saga La Pass.

Both departures are tied into annual festivals. The atmosphere of these ancient ceremonies is extraordinary. Tibetan horns blow, cymbals clash, drums beat and colourful, masked dancers twirl purifying the ground on which they stamp their feet. Outrageous clowns tease dancers and spectators alike. You just know the gods look on in approval!

But it is the people of Bhutan we want you to get to know, and best way to do this is to stay in their houses. Around 2015 some bright spark in the Ministry of Tourism came up with the idea of 'Homestays'. It has slowly but surely developed in standards of comfort and cleanliness, aided by the fact that before a family can accept paying foreigners their house must be approved by government. All homestays are regularly inspected and certified. We have always recommended homestays and incorporated them into a small selection of our group holidays and, without fail, our travellers always enjoy the experience. Meeting the families and their animals is quite an eye-opener. Sometimes yaks and/or cattle live on the ground floor and the family lives above. Bhutanese customs are quirky and their beliefs date back to a time that pre-dates Buddhism - animistic beliefs of spirits, both good and bad. Every house has a shrine room which you will be proudly shown. You will quickly learn the names of the most important deities, and the aura that surrounds them. The family who host you will no doubt entertain you with some of the folklore, legends and myths that are so integral to the Bhutanese way of life.

Let's not forget the scenery! Every valley is different, each one becomes your favourite in turn. You will obtain distant views of the very highest peaks, including the highest unclimbed peak in the world Mt. Gangkar Punsum, 7,550m/24,770ft.,

The culmination of this walking holiday will be the crossing on foot of the Saga La Pass, 3,597m/11,801 ft. and the descent to the ancient fortress of Drugyel Dzong. You spend the night on trek 'glamping' in a deluxe campsite with first-rate facilities. Finally, you will make the walk up to Taktsang Monastery, or Tiger's Nest as it is known, marking the climax of your stay in the Thunder Dragon Kingdom.

My Bhutan - by our MD, Steve Berry



The hidden kingdom of Bhutan stirs the imagination of all who yearn to travel and explore. Tucked away among the primeval folds of the Eastern Himalaya it takes up little space on the map, and possibly most of our planet's population knows nothing of its existence. Therein lies its appeal! Here is a land to be discovered, mysteries to be unravelled, and a culture from which to learn. It is little wonder that people should want to go there; who would believe that a land whose gods dwell on mountain tops, and where reincarnate lamas meditate in musty monasteries amidst mist-shrouded mountains, does actually exist in reality, and not just in the pages of some fairy story?

Indeed, for very many centuries the kingdom was closed to the outside world and ruled by a re-incarnate personage known as the Shabdrung (at whose feet one submits). The first Shabdrung arrived in 1616 from Tibet having experienced a vision in which he was urged (some say by two ravens) to leave his monastery of Ralung Gumpa and travel to Bhutan to find his destiny. He eventually unified the whole country, built most of the main monastery/fortresses you still see to this day, created a codicil of laws, and established a form of government. When he died his death was kept a secret for over forty years. Reincarnations of his mind, speech and body vied for power over the next 400 years causing much strife, until in 1907 the old tradition of re-incarnate rulers was swept aside and an hereditary monarchy was established.

However, the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon remained closed until tourism started in a very small way in 1974 when the 4th king came to the Raven throne. The first hotel was built in Paro, and a small dirt airstrip was constructed. In those days small twin engine aircraft flew across the plains of India, weaved their way through the foothills and steep valleys, and landed in a cloud of dust in front of the monastery/fortress of Paro Dzong. People were often seen to alight from the plane and make full body prostrations muttering prayers of thanks for their safe arrival. A small tin shed served as the Customs Clearance office, and brightly coloured dragonflies flew around the room. Today there is a tarmac runway, but even now you see people alight and kiss the ground.

Yes, since then Bhutan has slowly modernised, and today electric cars can be seen in the streets of Thimphu! Nevertheless, its people steadfastly follow the old traditions and are followers of a Red Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism known as Drukpa Kagyu. Their kings continue to wisely guide and advise the relatively new people's government headed now by an elected Prime Minister. Their code of ethics ensures 'Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National product', and their proud claim is that they are the only country in the world which is carbon negative.

I have been travelling, trekking and even climbing in Bhutan since 1986. In fact I attempted to climb Gangkar Punsum in 1986 after a Bhutanese colonel in exile secured him a permit, but that's another story! I have very many friends there now, and I have spent countless hours in their fascinating company. I just love listening to their stories, and the more I hear the more I am impressed by their beliefs, philosophy, and outlook on life. I feel honoured whenever I stay in one of their houses, and have enjoyed some amazing evenings in homestays. In fact, Lotay Gyeltshen is one of my oldest friends and you will have the pleasure of staying at his house for two nights.

My advice? Go to Bhutan and be ready to be amazed by the views, the history, the religion and its wonderful people. I hope you find it as fulfilling as I have.

Special notes

Bhutanese Homestays



Homestays in Bhutan give you a chance to experience first-hand the country's rich culture, warm hospitality, and way of life. Traditional Bhutanese houses are elaborately painted, and often the images you see are chosen to ward off evil spirits or to keep the family and its animals healthy. Every house has a shrine room where there will be statues, wall paintings, masks of gods and demons, and guardian deities. Living rooms are cosy, and it is not uncommon to share mealtimes with your hosts. Bedrooms are comfortable, bathrooms are usually shared, but are modern. Some homestays offer hot stone baths as well.

Your hosts may offer a range of different experiences. These could include: cooking lessons, milking a cow, dancing (especially after a few glasses of ara!), looking around the farmstead, learning about traditions, legends, and history. You may possibly eat with the family and will certainly enjoy the freshly cooked meals (vegetarian options are available). Go easy on the optional chilies! Try a game of darts (nothing like our darts!), or try your hand at archery. You might meet neighbours, monks, the family's herd of yaks, or watch ladies weaving the finest costumes to be found anywhere in the Himalaya.

Kathmandu - Paro flights

Please note that there is the small possibility that flight schedules between Kathmandu and Paro could change in the coming months. This may result in alterations to the itinerary and/or the dates of travel.

Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Depart London.

Depart London on your overnight flight to Kathmandu.

Overnight: In flight

Day 2: Arrive Kathmandu. Group transfer to hotel.

You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel. You might like to venture into Thamel, the tourist heart of Kathmandu, for your evening meal where you will find many restaurants and bars.

Overnight: Kathmandu Guest House or Similar, Kathmandu

Day 3: Fly to Paro in Bhutan. Sightseeing.

This morning you transfer to the airport for the flight to Paro, Bhutan's main airstrip at 2,250m/7,382ft. The flight often gives fantastic views of the Himalaya including Everest, and particularly exciting is the section through the Bhutanese foothills and the thrilling landing. Although you are at the mercy of the airline computer, if possible try to sit on the left-hand side of the plane for the best views. You will be met on arrival by your Bhutanese guide and then transferred to your hotel where you may have lunch depending on the time you arrive.

In the afternoon you will enjoy some sightseeing in and around Paro including a walk to visit Paro Dzong. This spectacular dzong is situated on a rocky outcrop above the Paro Chu River with views down both sides of the valley. Historically it was one of Bhutan's strongest and most strategic fortresses and, before the rebuilding of the Tashidodzong in Thimphu, it was also the seat of Bhutan's National Assembly.

Above the dzong is the 17th century watchtower or Ta Dzong. This unusual, circular building houses Bhutan's National Museum and has recently been fully restored. The museum has a fantastic collection of Bhutanese national treasures with displays including depictions of a wide range of Bhutan's history and culture.

If time allows you could also take a short walk to see a cantilevered bridge, visit Dungtse Lhakhang (temple), or take a stroll through Paro's interesting streets.

Overnight: Hotel Olathang or Similar, Paro (Meals: BLD)

Day 4: Walk to Kyichu Lhakhang - 3-4 hours. Drive to Thimphu - 1½-2 hours. Visit the giant Buddha statue.

This morning's walk begins from your hotel, taking you up and over a hill to Kyichu Lhakhang. On the way you will visit two ancient temples that signify long life. You reach the first - the 13th century Zhang Zha Gumpa - after about 1½ hours, then Tshering Lhakhang after another half hour of walking. From here it's another hour walking downhill to reach Kyichu Lhakhang. This is one of the most important temples in Bhutan dating back to the 8th century.

In the afternoon you will drive to Thimphu, stopping en route to visit Tamchhog Lhakang. This temple was built in the 14th century by the son of the very famous 'Iron Bridge' builder, Thangthong Gyalpo. You cross one of the eight bridges he built in Bhutan to reach the temple. It is an easy 15 minute walk from the road and has the immediate effect of transporting you back into the atmosphere of ancient Bhutan.



Driving on to Thimphu you will see that it has an attractive valley location and is relatively small for a capital city, although it has grown greatly in recent years. You will drive up to see the giant Buddha Dordenma statue and enjoy the far-reaching views its vantage place offers. You then continue to your hotel where you will spend the next two nights.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)

Day 5: Sightseeing in Thimphu. Afternoon walk to Wangditse Lhakhang - 1½-2 hours. Visit to Thimphu Dzong.

Your morning will be spent enjoying some of the sights of Thimphu. There are many places of interest to visit including the the Textile Museum, the late King's Memorial Chorten, the National Library, the School of Painting and the silversmiths and pottery workshops. The Government Handicrafts Emporium is possibly the best place to look for local handicraft. It is interesting to visit the handmade paper workshop to see the traditional processes involved in paper making. You could also visit the Post Office to buy some of Bhutan's very attractive stamps, they will even print a valid stamp with your face on it while you wait!

After lunch you will walk up to Sangaygang next to the Bhutan First Broadcasting Service tower, located about a mile away in the North West of Thimphu. There are great views over Thimphu Dzong and the Thimphu valley as you start your walk contouring the beautiful hills to visit Wangditse Lhakhang. You will have time to visit the gompa before you walk down for another 30 minutes to reach Dechen Phodrang Monastery. This monastery houses around 450 student monks and is also home to some fantastic UNESCO monitored 12th century paintings. You will then meet your vehicle and be driven back to Thimphu.

Your day ends with a visit to impressive Tashichhodzong which is the official seat of government in Bhutan.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)

Day 6: Attend the Dechunphu Tsechu.

Today you will attend a traditional Bhutanese festival, or tsechu. The Dechenphu Tsechu takes place annually at Dechenphu Lakhkang near Thimphu. The striking lakhang with its tower like, ochre-red walls, is one of the oldest in Bhutan and is dedicated to Gay Ngyen Jakpa Melen, a powerful guardian deity. The one-day tsechu is also held in his honour.

Festivals are welcome opportunities for the Bhutanese to get together, not only to socialise and have fun, but also because the very act of attending a festival is thought to confer merit and wash away sins. Spectacular masked dances are performed, called shams, which are intended to give moral instruction, drive away evil spirits, promote good crops and celebrate the Buddhist faith in its many guises. Watch out for the very jolly clowns who tease onlookers and dancers alike.

To fully enjoy the festival experience you will spend most of the day there.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)

Day 7: Visit Simtokha Dzong. Drive over the Dochu La Pass 3,100 m/10,170 ft. to Punakha - 2-3 hours. Walk to Samdingkha.

Before you start the drive over the Dochu La pass you will visit the very first dzong (monastery/fortress) ever to be built in Bhutan. Simtokha Dzong was built in 1628 by the most powerful ruler in Bhutan's history, the Shabdrung, Nawang Namgyal. It occupies a strategic position, and was built as protection against a demon which had disappeared into a rock close by.

You drive on to the Dochu La pass, 3,100 m/10,170 ft, and upon reaching the pass, walk up to the temple at the top of the hill for the best views of the Himalaya, including Bhutan's highest mountain Gangkar Punsum. The 108 chortens on the pass were built by the 4th king's four wives to commemorate his victory over the Bodo militants in 2003. If time allows it is interesting to do a short walk which connects 11 meditation caves close to the pass.



Continuing your journey the road snakes down some 30km to Punakha Dzong. Every year in the winter the main body of monks walk from Thimphu to Punakha and spend the winter in this dzong. Having looked around you will walk upstream on the left hand bank of the Pho Chu river which originates in Bhutan's remotest region, Lunana. This side valley is little visited, quiet, and very beautiful. The path undulates through forest affording lovely views of hamlets, villages, lone houses, and the odd temple. Sometimes you are high above the wide, braided river, sometimes there are minor rapids. Large mountains loom in a background haze. You come across the remains of a large ruined house, made in the traditional way with walls of compacted mud. The path

traverses around some ancient canyons whose walls and cliffs look like they are made of fossilised mud. As you get close to the steel girder bridge leading to Samdingkha there are cultivated fields with high strong fences to keep wild animals out of the crops.

You will be met at the small village of Samdingkha and driven down to the farmhouse homestay owned by Lotay Gyeltshen. Time permitting, you may stop to visit Meaneag Lhakhang en route. Lotay has in the past been the head cook on dozens of treks with our M.D. Steve Berry. He and his wife, Kuenga, have a delightful, traditional house and smallholding on the banks of the Pho Chu river. Possible activities at Lotay's house may include any of the following: cooking lessons, looking around the farmstead with Lotay to understand the methods and income from a small farm holding. Bird watching on the banks of the river, and maybe a game of darts.

Overnight: Lotay's Farmhouse Homestay, Punakha (Meals: BLD)

Day 8: Short drive to Kunega Zhedheyling Homestay. Three Temples walk - 3-4 hours.

After breakfast, you make the short drive to the Kuenga Zhedheyling Farmhouse Homestay in the Jibjokha Valley, where you will also be spending the night. Having picked up a picnic lunch, you set off from the farmhouse passing through rice terraces and soon encountering your first temple (or lakhang) at the tiny settlement of Jibjokha. There are some interesting statues to see here.

As you progress, your guide will point out Pangtse Shing (Symplocus) trees near the trail. This tree has many medicinal benefits and is also used for dyes and for the oil from its seeds which is prized in Bhutanese cuisine. In spring you will see the trees in flower and then the fruits appear in the autumn when the oil is extracted.



Your hike continues through fields into the Wangkha Valley where you will find your second temple built 40 years ago by the locals. After leaving the lakhang you will come across the house of Aum Karma Dem and may be able to rest awhile in her front garden and enjoy a cup of tea. Continuing on through more terraces the trail then enters some woods providing welcome shade if the weather is warm. At the end of the woods you reach a feeder 'road' leading into the Dawakha Valley. This valley is much more populated than the others. The main village here is Dawakha, which sits on high ground affording good views of the surrounding hills and valleys. This is the home of the third temple of the walk. There is also a shop in the village so you may be able to grab a cold drink before setting off downhill on a wooded track to get back to your starting point and overnight accommodation.

Overnight: Kuenga Zhedheyling Homestay, Punakha (Meals: BLD)

Day 9: Drive to Haa via the Chele La Pass, 3,990m/13,090ft. Walk to Kila Nunnery from the pass.

Today you will drive back over the Dochu La Pass, bypass Thimphu, and carry on towards Paro before turning up the mountain road which takes you eventually to the less visited valley of Haa.

It is about 1½ hour's drive from the Paro turn-off to reach the Chele La. On a clear day there are views of Kangchenjunga and other snowy giants in neighbouring Sikkim. From the pass you walk down to visit Kila nunnery, 3,683m/12,085ft. Just like the Tiger's Nest in Paro, and indeed hundreds of Bhutan's temples, Kila is a cliff temple. The walk takes about 1½ hours through forest, mixed rhododendron and carpets of flowers. You can visit the temples at Kila where nuns will anoint your head with scented water; it is customary to take a sip of the holy water. After your visit you descend the short distance to a rough road which takes you back and up to the Chele La and your vehicle.

Now comes the exciting descent down zigzags to Haa Township. Soon you will see the three conical mountains that are regarded as protective deities. Collectively they are known as Meri Punsum.

Having checked into your homestay you will be taken on a walk to Yangtong village. Here there was a fire in February 2002 which destroyed 11 houses although miraculously the village temple was untouched. After the tragedy the king donated money for the rebuilding. The workmanship is such that you would hardly guess half the village has been rebuilt.

Returning to the homestay visit you may visit Haa Dzong on route and also take a walk down through the town.

Overnight: Damchoe Pem Farmhouse or Pema Dema Homestay, Haa Valley (Meals: BLD)

Day 10: Trek from Talung to Chhoeduphu across the Saga La Pass, 3,597m/11,801ft - 17 km, 6-7 hours.

It's a 20 minute drive to the start of your two-day trek just above Talung village, 2,996m/9,830ft. The first hour and a half is easily up through primula covered meadows. Often there are herds of Yak here. You then cross two bridges until you come to a junction of paths - the left-hand route leads into Tibet, the right-hand fork should be signed 'Saga La'. It is all too easy to take the left-hand path as it is the more obvious.

The path to the Saga La only takes 1½ hours but is more steeply uphill. There's a sheltered canopy on the pass which is a good place to stop for lunch.

On a clear day you have excellent views of Bhutan's second highest mountain, Mt Chomolhari 7,326m/24,035ft, and its satellite peaks. These include the incredibly beautiful Mt Jitchu Drake at 6,662m/21,857ft high. From the pass take the left-hand path and descend to Dongney Tsho/Chhoeduphu. Tread with care as the path can be slippery in places if wet. There are also two streams to cross.

Your overnight 'camp' is in a tiny hamlet where an old farmhouse has been tastefully converted, and where a number of luxury tents, with en suite bathrooms, await.

Overnight: Chhoeduphu Deluxe Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 11: Trek to Drugyel Dzong - 1.5km, 1½-2 hours. Transfer to homestay in the Paro Valley.

The trail to Drugyel Dzong begins by walking for 20 minutes to an old ruin. You will spot a lone Cypress tree from where the faint trail continues downhill to Paro valley below. The track is sometimes overgrown, and your guide will carry a machete for path clearing purposes.

Drugyel Dzong was built in the early 1600s to protect the new Kingdom of Bhutan from Tibetan invasions, and was destroyed by fire in 1951, and has only recently been fully restored. You'll have time to look around the dzong before your driver takes you to Lamgong village where you will stay the night at a heritage homestay.

Overnight: Rinpung Heritage Homestay or Amas Farmhouse, Lamgong Village Paro (Meals: BLD)

Day 12: Walk up to Tiger's Nest Monastery then return to homestay. Evening cultural show.

A short drive beyond Paro takes you to the trail head for the walk up to the famous Tiger's Nest, Taktsang Monastery. The monastery is perched some 600m/2,000ft up on a cliff overlooking the valley and was said to be where the legendary Indian saint, Guru Padma Sambhava, flew from Tibet on the back of a tiger to defeat five demons, who were opposing the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan.

It's a steep uphill walk through woods of about 1½-2hrs, to reach a tea house (an ascent of 340m/1,115ft). Apart from offering welcome refreshment this is one of the principle viewpoints of Taktsang. A further half an hour's ascent brings you to another viewpoint directly across from Taktsang. The final section of the walk takes you from here steeply down 100m/330ft into the gorge that separates you from the monastery and then climbs back up again to reach the monastery gate. If there are no VIPs visiting, or other official events, you should be able to enter.



Once you have finished, and walked back down, your driver will meet you and take you back to your homestay. Later in the evening your hosts will present a cultural show with music and dancing to mark your last night in Bhutan.

Overnight: Rinpung Heritage Homestay or Amas Farmhouse, Lamgong Village Paro (Meals: BLD)

Day 13: Fly to Kathmandu. Transfer to hotel.

After breakfast, you will transfer to Paro Airport where you will say a fond farewell to your guide and driver. You then check in for your flight, normally in the early morning, which takes you out and over the Bhutanese mountains and past Kangchenjunga, Makalu and Everest (the latter is quite distant on this flight), finally dropping down into the Kathmandu Valley. You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel in central Kathmandu with the rest of the day free.

Overnight: Kathmandu Guest House or Similar, Kathmandu (Meals: B)

Day 14: Time at leisure. Late afternoon transfer to airport for overnight flight to London.

There is still time today for some last-minute shopping or sightseeing in Kathmandu, or simply to relax at your hotel. The day is yours until the afternoon group transfer to the airport for your flight back to London.

Overnight: In flight (Meals: B)

Day 15: Arrive London.

Our grading system

Temple Trails & Homestays, Bhutan is graded as a **Gentle/Moderate** walking holiday, as described below.

Gentle

Trips within this grade typically mix sightseeing with easy-paced half and/or full day walks. On these trips, walks will be on relatively low altitude trails, for a duration of around 4-6 hours. On all of our Gentle graded trips, some ascent and descent should be anticipated, and there may occasionally be a longer walking day. Holidays within this grade generally use hotels and comfortable lodges although a few do have some nights camping.

Moderate

Holidays in this grade typically involve 5 to 10 days of walking or trekking. They will often venture into more remote country and can cross mountain passes. Altitudes though are still relatively low, going no higher than around 4,300m/14,000ft. Accommodation can include simple hotels, tea houses, lodges and camping. These holidays are suitable for people who enjoy easy-paced walks in the British countryside or exploring on foot rather than in a vehicle.

Trip altitude

Important - please be aware that this trip involves travel at altitude. Whilst all our itineraries are carefully designed to optimise acclimatisation to high altitudes, participants on this trip are likely to experience some symptoms of being at altitude. The Dossier pack we provide when you book your holiday includes comprehensive advice on safe travel at altitude. If you require further information or advice on travel at altitude prior to booking please contact the office to speak to an experienced member of our team. Alternatively we recommend www.medex.org.uk as a good source of information.

What the price includes

Mountain Kingdoms aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

What's included:

- ✓ An English-speaking Bhutanese leader.
- ✓ All internal flights and domestic airport transfers.
- ✓ 4* hotel in Kathmandu on a bed & breakfast, twin-share basis.
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation in Bhutan on a full board, twin-share basis.
- ✓ Six nights in Bhutan Government approved farmhouse homestays with all meals.
- ✓ One night in a deluxe camp with twin share tents and all meals.
- ✓ Bhutan Visa and Bhutan departure tax.
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified.
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only).
- ✓ Single, timed, group airport transfers for international flights on arrival and departure.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option).
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms kitbag

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

What's not included:

- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Visa fees for Nepal
- ✗ Lunch and evening meals in Kathmandu
- ✗ Optional trips
- ✗ Tips

Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate.

For further information about our campaign visit [For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>](https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign).

Your accommodation

We will endeavour to secure the hotels named in the itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is not available we will book a suitable alternative of a similar standard.

Hotels in Bhutan

Please note that there is generally a shortage of hotel/lodge accommodation in Bhutan, especially outside Paro and Thimphu. Although we pre-book rooms as far in advance as possible, anything can happen and probably will, e.g. if the royal family suddenly has a visiting delegation, accommodation may be changed at short notice. Additionally, during peak seasons, it can sometimes be very difficult to secure not only the hotels/lodges we want, but also the single rooms we might need. In these circumstances singles may occasionally be asked to share but in such cases we refund any single room supplements that might apply. Given these conditions we will make every effort to secure any of the following hotels:



Kathmandu Guest House or Similar, Kathmandu

The Kathmandu Guest House is a 4* hotel situated right in the heart of Thamel - the tourist hub of the city. Known as Kathmandu's 'original hotel' it has been extensively renovated over recent years and has good quality rooms, a spa, gardens and a restaurant. The hotel also houses the excellent Museum of Nepali Art (MONA) which showcases traditional and contemporary works of art - admission is free for Mountain Kingdoms guests.



Hotel Olathang or Similar, Paro

Originally built for the coronation of the Bhutan's 4th King in 1974, this attractive hotel stands on a hill overlooking Paro town. Rooms in the main building are set around a peaceful courtyard and there are also a number of cottages dotted around the spacious grounds. Decoration is typically Bhutanese with stripped wooden floors and colourfully painted walls. Rooms are well-equipped and the hotel has its own spa, international restaurant and bar.



Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu

Despite its somewhat dark entrance hall, this hotel is very well appointed, with custom made Bhutanese wooden furniture and good sized rooms. During busy periods, especially during festivals, we may use the Jomolhari Hotel, the Kisa Hotel, Hotel Gakyil, Hotel Osel or the Amodhara Hotel. These are amongst the best tourist class hotels in Thimphu.



Lotay's Farmhouse Homestay, Punakha

Lotay Gyeltshen was the most senior trekking cook for our partners in Bhutan. He is now retired from trekking, but he and his wife run a fantastic Homestay in the Punakha Valley. Their traditional house has a beautiful setting on the banks of the Puna Tsang Chu River - a great spot for birdwatching. Bedrooms have twin mattresses and there are shared, modern, bathroom facilities. All meals are provided at the homestay with much produce grown in their smallholding. During your stay there may be an opportunity for a hot stone bath, take a cookery lesson, and have a go at archery.



Kuenga Zhedheyling Homestay, Punakha

Situated above the village of Samdingkha is the valley of Jibjokha accessed on a rough jeep track. The village there bears the same name. This is a stunning homestay with five bedrooms. Its living room has full length windows on three sides giving fabulous views of the village, fields and mountains (shown here).



Damchoe Pem Farmhouse or Pema Dema Homestay, Haa Valley

Owned by the wife of a retired colonel of the Bhutan army this homestay is exceptionally nice but has only three twin rooms. However, the colonel himself owns the Jampelyang Hotel next door and, if needed, we will use both. Alternatively, we may use the Pema Dema Homestay in Talung village.



Chhoeduphu Deluxe Camp

Situated in a remote side valley on the way down from the Saga La Pass an old farmhouse has been tastefully converted and houses an atmospheric dining room, kitchen and bar. Sleeping accommodation is in large, walk-in deluxe tents with en suite bathrooms which sit on a terrace next to the old house.



Rinpung Heritage Homestay or Amas Farmhouse, Lamgong Village Paro

Rinpung is over 100 years old and is a large imposing house. Beautiful inside and out, it boasts a large dining room and 5 double bedrooms. There are no less than 4 shower rooms with modern WCs. It used to be owned by a man who traded with Tibet in the days before the Dalai Lama left Tibet.

Amas Farmhouse, very nearby is of a very similar size and is also a beautiful homestay property. Pictured here is an image of one of the bedrooms at the homestay.

Meal arrangements

13 x breakfasts, 13 x lunches, 11 x dinners. Bed and breakfast in Kathmandu. All meals in Bhutan.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

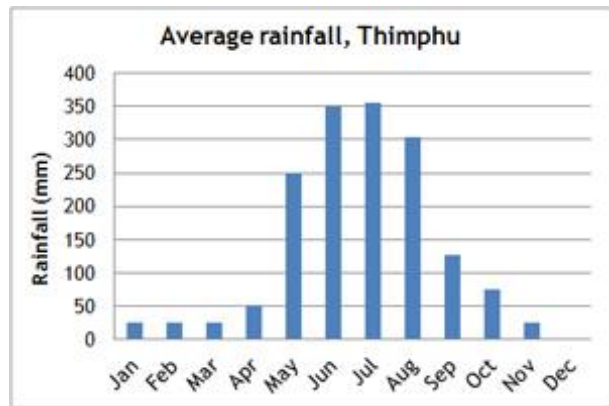
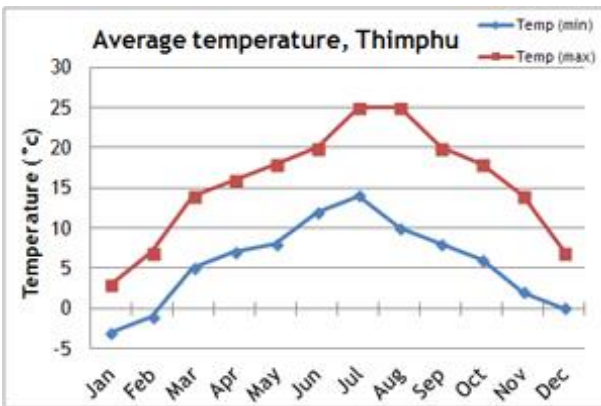
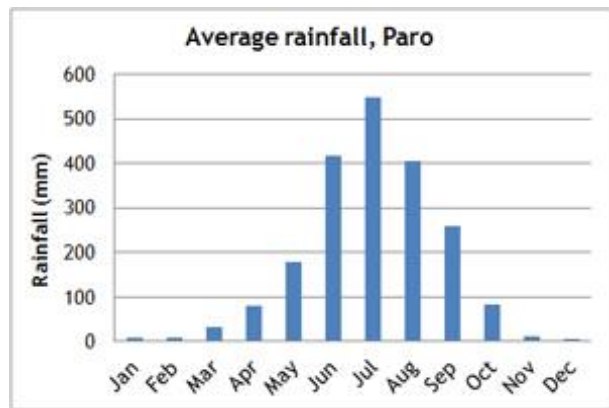
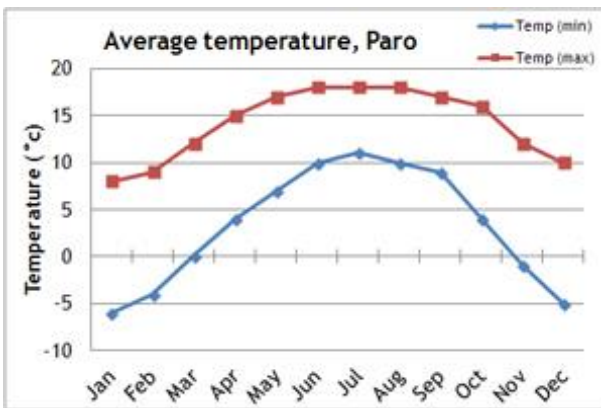
Further information

When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

The nature of adventure travel

Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

Climate information



Extensions

Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at www.mountainkingdoms.com.



Hotel upgrades and extra nights in Bhutan

If you would like to upgrade your hotel during your holiday take a look at our selection of luxury properties in Bhutan such as Uma Paro or the Taj Tashi in Thimphu, you can download a leaflet from our website detailing all hotel options. We can also add additional nights in Bhutan at the start or end of your trip.



Additional accommodation in Nepal

If you would like to extend your stay in Nepal, you can add extra nights at your group tour accommodation or choose from our range of distinctive properties in Pokhara and the Kathmandu area. We can offer luxury resorts, heritage hotels, tranquil lodges and characterful cottages. Our selection includes Dwarika's Resort at Dhulikhel, Pavilions Himalaya at Pokhara, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge and Shivapuri Heights Cottage. Individual extension leaflets for all these options can be downloaded from our website or requested from our office.



Kathmandu Valley sightseeing excursions

We can arrange half day or full day sightseeing tours taking you to the key cultural attractions of central Kathmandu or the Kathmandu Valley including the World Heritage Sites of Bhaktapur and Patan. Your tour will be led by an English speaking guide and you will have a private vehicle and driver.



Wildlife extensions in Nepal - Chitwan, Bardia & Koshi Tappu

Visit Chitwan or Bardia National Parks home to a rich variety of birds and animals including elephant, rhinos, leopard and Bengal tiger. Stay in a comfortable lodge and enjoy a range of wildlife viewing activities. Alternatively visit the renowned Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve - one of the finest birdwatching and wildlife areas in all Asia.

Royal Manas National Park, Bhutan

Extend your stay in Bhutan with an extension to the Royal Manas National park, a wonderful birder's paradise close to the Indian border. Our extension package gives you three full days to explore the park and surrounding area, and you will be accompanied throughout by a specialist bird and wildlife guide. We also include all meals, private transport to/from Paro, and hotel accommodation close to the park.

Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

- This carefully researched itinerary is unique to Mountain Kingdoms. We want to show you Bhutan first-hand!
- There are six nights in Bhutanese farmhouse homestays giving you a more personal and authentic insight into the country, its customs and its people. Other nights are in good quality hotels plus a 'glamping' night on trek.
- Our day walks in Punakha's side valley of the Mo Chu river, and in the Haa valley, are off-the-beaten-track, quiet, beautiful and feel like 'old' Bhutan.
- For a truly remote experience there is a two-day trek across the Saga La Pass from Haa valley to Drugyel Dzong.
- We include a day at a Tibetan Buddhist festival in both departures.
- Your trek will be led by a knowledgeable, well-trained English-speaking guide.
- We have been pioneering holidays in Bhutan for over 30 years. Many members of the Mountain Kingdoms team have first-hand experience of Bhutan and our MD, Steve Berry, researched this trip in 2024. He will be very happy to answer any questions you may have.
- We have been working with our partners in Bhutan for many years. Their knowledge, experience and attention to detail means you can be assured of a very high quality holiday.
- Our maximum group size is 12 for this trip. This provides for a genuine small group travel experience and helps reduce the negative aspects associated with larger groups.
- We offer a flexible service and can extend your holiday with extra hotel nights, upgrades and exciting activities.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights team for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

Complete financial security

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

No Surcharge Guarantee

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

Award winning Responsible Tourism

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at www.mountainkingdoms.com.

Genuine small group travel

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

Loyalty Discount

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

Comprehensive information

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit www.tourismdeclares.com

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

Carbon Offsetting

Already doing:

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

Will do:

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Already doing:

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

Will do:

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.

