

## Highlights of Bhutan in Style with Talo Tsechu

Traditional villages, a vibrant festival and the best of Bhutan's cultural treasures, whilst staying in sumptuous accommodation throughout.



### Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

### Holiday overview

Style	Tour
Accommodation	Hotels
Grade	Tour
Duration	13 days from London to London
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Leader Bhutan
Land only	Joining in Kathmandu, Nepal
Max altitude	3,116m/10,223ft, Dochu La, Day 6

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



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# Departures

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## Group departures

### 2022 Dates:

Sun 03 Apr - Fri 15 Apr      With Talo Tsechu  
Wed 28 Sep - Mon 10 Oct      With Thimphu Tsechu

This is the itinerary for our April departure only. A separate itinerary is available for our September departure which can be requested from our office or downloaded from the Mountain Kingdoms website.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

# Your guide

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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. Guides receive regular 'top-up' training and 15 of our regular leaders have completed an extended training course run by Mountain Kingdoms in Bhutan.

## Your trip highlights

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- Stay in first-rate hotel accommodation throughout such as stunning Uma Punakha
- Explore Bhutan's key cultural sights including the Tiger's Nest Monastery and Punakha Dzong
- Join the festivities at the flamboyant Talo Tsechu
- Take an Everest flight for close up views of the world's highest mountain
- Enjoy a guided tour of some of Kathmandu's main heritage sites and stay at the stylish Heritage Hotel in Bhaktapur

## At a glance itinerary

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Days 1-3	Fly to Kathmandu. Sightseeing tour.
Days 4-5	Fly to Paro in Bhutan. Drive to Thimphu. Sightseeing and visit to Wangditse Monastery
Days 6-7	Drive to Punakha. Sightseeing at Drukpa Kunley's Temple and Punakha Dzong. Visit villages in the Punakha Valley. Attend the Talo Tsechu.
Days 8-9	Drive to Paro. Visit a local family and try traditional activities. Sightseeing in Paro Valley.
Day 10	Visit Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest).
Days 11-13	Fly to Kathmandu. Take a flight to view Everest. Sightseeing tour. Transfer to airport. Fly to London.

## Trip summary

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Treat yourself to something really special as you tour the cultural attractions of the Thunder Dragon Kingdom from the indulgent comfort of some of the most stylish hotels in Paro, Punakha and Thimphu.

Your journey through picturesque western Bhutan is one of compelling contrasts and is the perfect introduction to the Thunder Dragon Kingdom. You visit the imposing monastery-fortresses of Punakha and Paro Dzong; take a walk up to Bhutan's most iconic sight - spectacular Taktsang Monastery; and discover out-the-way villages where you will meet the locals and have the opportunity to try your hand at some traditional Bhutanese pastimes. Anyone for archery? You will explore picturesque monasteries, thriving towns and fascinating museums, and also visit artisan workshops where you can see craftsmen and women demonstrating their time-honoured skills. And, for the icing on the cake, you can join the festivities at the colourful Talo Festival, renowned for its splendid masked dances and mischievous clowns.

Each night you will relax in a first class hotel providing the highest standards of comfort and service, whilst reflecting the authentic architecture and heritage of Bhutan.

Before and after your time in Bhutan you will also explore the ancient cities of the Kathmandu Valley and take an unforgettable flight into the high Himalaya for a close-up look at Mount Everest.



# Your trip itinerary

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## Day 1: Depart London.

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Fly overnight from London to Kathmandu.

**Overnight: In flight**

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## Day 2: Arrive Kathmandu. Drive to Bhaktapur.

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On arrival in Kathmandu you will drive the short distance to the city of Bhaktapur to your first hotel. If there is time you might take a walk to explore some of the fascinating streets of this lovely old city.

Bhaktapur is one of three major cities built in the Kathmandu valley by the old Malla kings who ruled the Kathmandu Valley hundreds of years ago. The city is a repository of traditional Nepalese architecture and local Newari craftsmanship where you will find ancient Hindu temples, Buddhist stupas, crumbling shrines, picturesque Rana palaces and crowded bazaars. Many of the buildings in Bhaktapur have their origins in the 15th Century and the side streets, being mostly brick paved, still have a really medieval feel to them. It is still very much a lived in city, and with much of it being closed to traffic, walking around is a pleasure and you will get a feeling for how things must have been in medieval times. Bhaktapur is quieter than Kathmandu city and still has quite a rural feel to it. The local people are still predominantly farmers and the town is famous for its home-made yoghurt as well as for its pottery made from the local red clay - you can see this production going on in the so-called 'pottery square' and other side streets.

**Overnight: Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur**

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## Day 3: Sightseeing in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Patan.

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After breakfast you will have a tour of Bhaktapur. This city is a real cultural gem. Built by the Malla kings who reigned up until the 18th century, Bhaktapur has many outstanding examples of the exceptional architecture and craftsmanship of the local Newari ethnic group. You will see fine palaces and temples with gilded roofs, open courtyards and elaborate windows carved in wood. The main focus for the town is the central Durbar Square where many of the finest buildings are found, including the famous palace of 55 windows which shows some of the best examples of elaborately carved windows and doors. The city is a centre for craftsmanship and teachings. After the tour you will have lunch in Bhaktapur.



Later you will have some sightseeing in Kathmandu's historic Durbar Square, with its many superb ancient temples and palaces including Hanuman Dhoka (the old Royal Palace) and the palace of the Kumari, the so called 'Living Goddess' where you may catch sight of the goddess looking down at you from one of the carved windows of the palace. You will also see many other wonderful masterpieces of Newari architecture and wood carving.

You will then travel on to Patan, the third of the ancient Malla cities of the Kathmandu Valley. Patan, is another showpiece of Newari architecture with its own spectacular Durbar square, palaces and temples. It also has a good museum housed in an old Malla palace where there are excellent displays of the traditional crafts for which the craftsmen of Patan are famous including, cast bronzes and gilt copper repousse work. After your sightseeing you will return to your hotel in Bhaktapur.

**Overnight: Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur (Meals: B L)**

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## Day 4: Fly to Paro, 2,334m/7,657ft. Drive to Thimphu via Tachog Lakhang.

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Transfer to the airport for the short flight up to Bhutan. On a clear day the panoramic views of the Himalaya are sensational, including Everest, but particularly exciting is the approach through the Bhutanese foothills and the landing, including a few steep turns on the approach to the tiny airstrip of Paro. If possible try to sit on the left hand side of the plane for the most spectacular views.

In Paro you will be met by your guide and driver and will transfer to Thimphu (1½ hours' drive). En route you can stop to visit Tachog Lakhang, a temple built in the 14th century. To reach it you have to walk across one of

the ancient bridges built by the famous 'Iron Bridge' builder, Thangthong Gyalpo. Thangtong was a great Buddhist master and also a pioneering civil engineer of the 15th century who is said to have built 58 iron chain suspension bridges around Tibet. He is often portrayed holding a section of iron chain in his right hand. This is just a short walk of about 15 minutes and the temple has a wonderful atmosphere of old Bhutan and is a lovely place to visit.

Thimphu itself has an attractive valley location and is relatively small for a capital city but it has grown greatly in recent years. There are many places of interest to visit and initially, before checking in to your hotel, you might drive up to the giant Buddha statue to enjoy the splendid views out over the town. Depending on your flight schedule there may be time for a little sightseeing round town or an orientation walk downtown.

**Overnight: Druk Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 5: Sightseeing in Thimphu. Visit Wangditse Monastery.**

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This morning you will visit the Tashichhodzong (the main government buildings), the Textile Museum, the Heritage 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 handicrafts especially if you are looking to buy national dress. The handmade paper workshop is a very interesting visit to see the paper being made. Nice items made from handmade paper are for sale there. You could also visit the Post Office to buy some of Bhutan's very attractive stamps. They also often have good t-shirts available to buy there. You might also just walk along the main street in town and watch local life go by.

In the afternoon you will drive up to Sangaygang next to the Bhutan First Broadcasting Service tower, located in the North West of Thimphu. It is only about a mile drive up to the tower so if you feel like you would like to burn a bit more energy you can always walk up instead. From the tower you will have great views over Thimphu Dzong and the Thimphu valley as you start your walk contouring the beautiful hills to visit Wangditse Gumpa. This walk should take around 1½ hours. You will have time to visit the gumpa before you walk down for another 30 minutes to reach Dechen Phodrang Monastery. This monastery houses around 450 student monks enrolled in a 8 year course and is also home to some fantastic UNESCO monitored 12th century paintings.

**Overnight: Druk Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 6: Drive to Punakha - 3 hours. Visit Drukpa Kunley's Temple and Punakha Dzong.**

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From Thimphu you make the ascent up to the Dochu La pass. This pass at 3,048m/10,000ft is marked by 108 chortens. Here, weather permitting you will take in a magnificent mountain vista. On clear days there are fabulous views of the Eastern Himalaya, but this is a beautiful spot even on misty days.

Descending from the pass you come to the lush Punakha Valley. Before driving on to your hotel you will pay a visit to Chimi Lakhang, taking a short walk across the paddy fields to visit this delightful small temple built by Drukpa Kunley. Known as 'The Divine Madman', Drukpa Kunley was a 15th century Bhutanese lama and is Bhutan's most popular saint and one of the most important figures in Bhutanese folklore. Despite the apparent conservatism of the Bhutanese people, Drukpa Kunley with his unconventional views on sex is a great favourite throughout the country. Chimi Lakhang is especially popular with women who come here to pray for children. The temple is characterised by its many phallic symbols.



#### **The Divine Madman" - Drukpa Kunley (1455-1520)**

In Bhutanese mythology, Drukpa Kunley is one of the most beloved and revered sages of Tibetan Buddhism. Many are the legends that surround him and he followed a wandering lifestyle and was both an eccentric and highly regarded saint. He was renowned for his shocking behaviour and his ability to perform miracles. He taught a form of Tantric Buddhism and advocated that sexual freedom was at the centre of Truth. The wooden phalluses that hang from the corners of Bhutanese houses and the paintings of penises that you often see on either side of the front door of houses are a relic of his teachings.

In the afternoon you will visit the fabulous Punakha Dzong, one of the most spectacular and important monastery/fortresses in the kingdom. It is picturesquely situated at the confluence of two rivers. In 1994 there was a major flood in the town which caused a lot of damage to the dzong but it has now been beautifully renovated and is a real showcase for Bhutanese craftsmanship and painting. You are normally allowed into the dzong unless there are VIPs visiting. After your visit you will return to your hotel.

**Overnight: Uma Punakha or Similar, Punakha (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 7: In the Punakha Valley. Visit Talo Tsechu.**

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Today you drive a short distance into the hills above Punakha, up to the charming village of Talo to attend its jolly festival. Talo is a very pretty and well-kept village, well known for its fine gumpa, the Talo Sangnacholing, where the festival is held. The gumpa is built on a plateau above the village and enjoys majestic views. Bhutanese festivals are important cultural and religious events and are a chance for local people to attain merit by taking part, as well as an opportunity to dress up in their best clothes, socialise and generally have fun. The Talo Tsechu is famed for its masked dances - such masked dances and the other colourful ceremonies at festivals are thought to dispel the evil spirits that have accumulated over the last year. Beware the very naughty clowns (called atsaras) who tease the crowd and the dancers!



While in Talo you might walk down through the village to have a look at traditional village life going on. The beautiful farm houses of the village have their own flower gardens, and corn and vegetables are grown in abundance. It's all very pretty. You come out back onto the road and if you have time you might walk down through woods and fields, or drive down, to the village of Nobgang. This village was the birthplace of the four girls who, in 1979, married King Jigme Singye Wangchuck to become his four queens. After the King's abdication they became Bhutan's Queen Mothers. The Nobgang gompas are sponsored by their family. The two villages of Talo and Nobgang have a longstanding rivalry in archery.

**Overnight: Uma Punakha or Similar, Punakha (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 8: Drive to Paro - 3½ hours. Visit local family and try traditional activities.**

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You leave Punakha and begin the long ascent up to the Dochu La where you can have a last look at the views. You descend from the pass and drive on to Paro.

The Paro Valley has had great strategic importance in the history of Bhutan and was in the past an important staging post on the trade routes with Tibet. Paro Dzong, situated on a rocky outcrop above the Paro Chu, and with views down both sides of the valley, was historically one of Bhutan's strongest and most strategic fortresses. Before the rebuilding of the Tashidozong in Thimphu it was also the seat of Bhutan's National Assembly. You will have the opportunity in the afternoon to see something of the Bhutanese way of life. You will visit a local family farm in the Paro Valley where you will see some of the typical architecture of the valley and some local farming methods. You might also have a go at some traditional Bhutanese activities, such as taking a cookery lesson to learn how typical local food is prepared or try your hand at archery, a favourite Bhutanese pastime. If none of these appeal you could choose to experience a Bhutanese 'hot stone bath'.

**Overnight: Hotel Zhiwaling or Similar, Paro (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 9: Sightseeing in the Paro Valley.**

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This morning you will drive up towards the Cheli La Pass and visit Dzong Drakha, a beautiful cliff temple situated just off the road leading up to the pass. This is a lovely spot and the views over the Paro Valley are stunning. Returning to Paro you will have time for more sightseeing. You will visit the historic Paro Dzong which sits above the valley. Above the dzong, the ancient watchtower known as the Ta Dzong, houses the museum, with a fantastic collection of Bhutanese national treasures. Displays in the various galleries depict the range of Bhutan's history and culture and include an impressive collection of ancient thangkas depicting Bhutan's important saints and teachers, as well as some fearsome festival masks, a collection of religious statues and some early stone carvings, as well as some original iron links from the nearby Tamchhog Bridge. During reconstruction of the Tza Dzong, which was damaged in an earthquake, the collection may be housed in a nearby building.

Later you might also visit Kyichu Lhakhang. This temple is one of the oldest and most beautiful temples in Bhutan. It was one of 108 temples built by Songtsen Gampo, an important early Tibetan king. Its purpose was to subdue a Bon demon that was thought to hover over the whole of Tibet and was obstructing the spread of Buddhism. Kyichu Lhakhang is said to pin down the left foot of the demon.

**Overnight: Hotel Zhiwaling or Similar, Paro (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 10: Walk to Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest). At leisure.**

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Today you will drive a little further up the valley to 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 tea house is one of the principle viewpoints of Taktsang, and those who prefer not to climb any further can relax here whilst others continue on. If there is a particular religious gathering or VIP visit in progress, you will not be able to enter the monastery but the further half an hour's ascent is well worth it, as it brings you to another viewpoint directly across from Taktsang. If you are able to make a visit, 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. Please note that if you prefer not to make the walk up to Taktsang your driver will be able to take you instead further along the valley to visit Drukgyel Dzong. Nearby there is an excellent viewpoint for the summit of Mount Chomolhari, which at 7,313m/23,997ft, is the second highest peak in Bhutan.

You will have lunch at a tea house during your trek to Taktsang, probably at the viewpoint overlooking the monastery. On returning to your hotel in Paro you may either have the afternoon to relax and enjoy the facilities of the hotel, or to do some more sightseeing.

**Overnight: Hotel Zhiwaling or Similar, Paro (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 11: Fly to Kathmandu. Time at leisure.**

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You will transfer to Paro Airport where you will say goodbye to your guide and driver. You then check in for your flight, normally in the early morning. Your flight 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 and transferred to the Heritage Hotel in Bhaktapur, after which you will have time to relax or for shopping or sightseeing.

**Overnight: Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur (Meals: B)**

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#### **Day 12: Everest flight. Sightseeing in Kathmandu. Transfer to airport and depart for London.**

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In the early morning you will transfer to the domestic airport to embark on a spectacular flight to view Mount Everest, with views of other 8,000m giants; Makalu, Kanchenjunga, Cho Oyu and Lhotse as well as hundreds of other peaks, spires and pinnacles. You will return to your hotel for breakfast.

Later you will enjoy your final sightseeing. Firstly you will drive to Pashupatinath a complex of Hindu temple buildings located not far from Dwarika's Hotel on the banks of the sacred Bagmati River. Here are found Kathmandu's main cremation ghats on the river banks as well as the most important Shiva temple in Nepal. You will then drive the short distance to Boudhanath where you will visit the ancient Buddhist stupa there. Pilgrims from all over the Indian subcontinent flock to Boudhanath to go round the stupa in a clockwise direction, turning prayer wheels as they pass. You then return to your hotel at Bhaktapur until you are transferred to the airport for your overnight flight back to London.

**Overnight: In flight**

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#### **Day 13: Arrive London.**

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## Our grading system

First Class Bhutan is graded as a Tour, as described below.

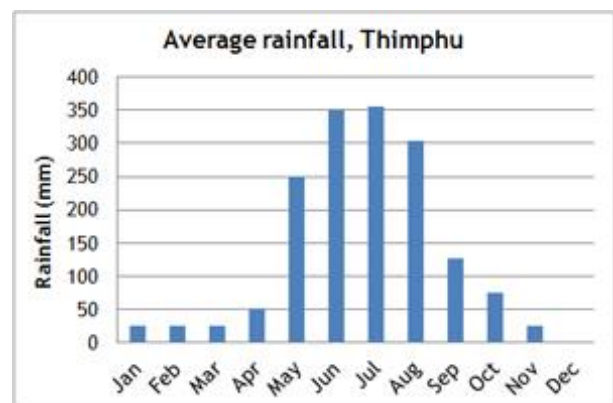
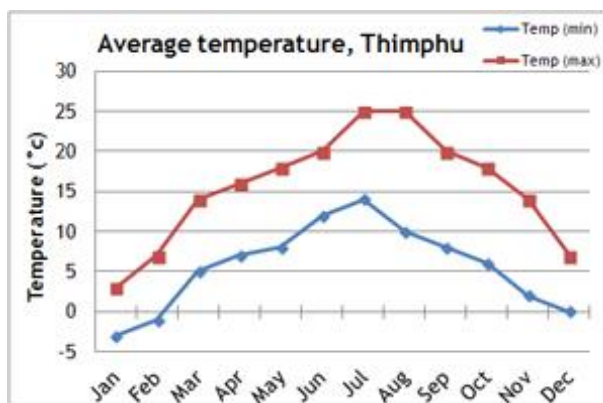
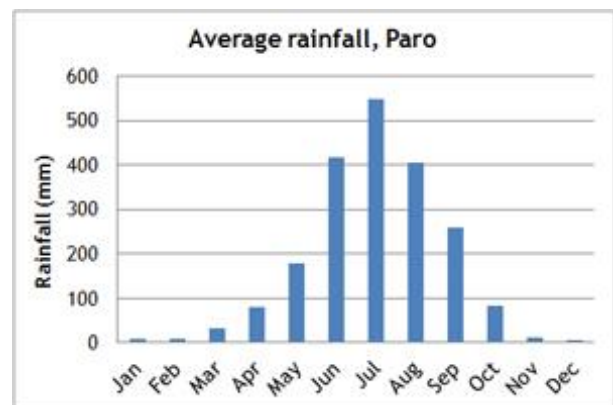
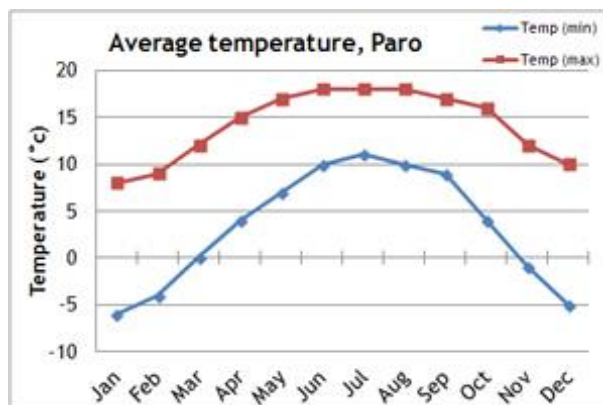
### Tours

Tours may include any of the following activities: sightseeing, visiting local villages, exploring temples, game viewing, birdwatching, husky sledding, mountain flights, city tours and dramatic journeys by road, rail, or river. Occasionally there will be short, gentle walks so that you can properly explore the cultural sites you are visiting.

## 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](http://www.medex.org.uk) as a good source of information.

## Climate information





## What the price includes

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**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 qualified Bhutanese tour leader
- ✓ An English-speaking guide in Kathmandu
- ✓ Everest flight
- ✓ Flights between Kathmandu and Paro and hotel/airport transfers
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK (upgrades available) & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ Single, timed group airport transfers for international flights on arrival and departure
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ Bhutan visa and Bhutan departure tax
- ✓ Premium hotel accommodation in Kathmandu on a twin share, bed and breakfast basis
- ✓ Top quality hotels (5 and 4 star) in Bhutan on twin share, full board basis
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle or Mountain Kingdoms fleece
- ✓ The opportunity to attend one of our pre trip meets in the Cotswolds

### 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 and excursions
- ✗ 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 <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>.

## Your accommodation

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### **Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur**

The Heritage Hotel is a handsome hotel which reflects the rich past of the Kathmandu Valley. It is a comfortable boutique hotel built in traditional Newari style and influenced by the art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur and the historic heritage of the Malla and Rana eras. The hotel was built with old handmade bricks from Rana palaces, and reclaimed timber from the valley, along with antiques dating back from 16th century. Furniture in the hotel is hand crafted by local craftsmen mostly using reclaimed wood from traditional Newari houses, Rana royal palaces and other old residences. The hotel offers you a taste of authentic Nepali culture and hospitality in a luxurious setting.



### **Druk Hotel or Similar, Thimphu**

This four star property is one of Thimphu's longest established hotels and has recently been renovated to give it a stylish and modern feel as well as good facilities. It is conveniently located in the centre of Thimphu and has well-appointed rooms and a spa.



### **Uma Punakha or Similar, Punakha**

The Uma Punakha is an elegant, luxury hotel property. Nestled on the hillside beside the Mo Chu River, the spacious rooms have sweeping views of the Punakha Valley and offer every comfort. The hotel has an excellent dining room and spa facilities. Rooms at the Uma Punakha are limited and in the event that space is not available you will stay at another upmarket property in Punakha.



### **Hotel Zhiwaling or Similar, Paro**

The Hotel Zhiwaling is the first and only wholly Bhutanese owned hotel to be awarded 5 star status. The hotel is located in a peaceful area not far from Paro town and has beautiful gardens. It is built in traditional Bhutanese style with fine decoration, a spectacular lobby and spacious, comfortable rooms with all facilities. It offers a spa as well as a traditional Bhutanese outdoor hot stone bath.

## Meal arrangements

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Bed and breakfast in Kathmandu, plus lunch on Day 3. Full board in Bhutan.

## Flight arrangements

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### **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

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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

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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.

## Extensions

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### 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](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).

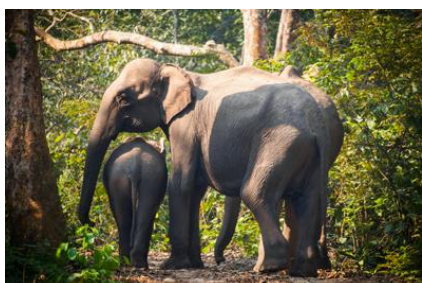


#### Additional accommodation in Nepal

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.

#### 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.



#### Bumthang Extension

A five night extension taking in the key sights of the cultural heartland of Bhutan. The Bumthang region is a centre for Bhutanese weaving and is home to some of the country's most spectacular temples and fortresses. It is also very scenic and offers ample opportunities for walks along its four main valleys.

#### Bumdra Trek

Add an overnight trek to your Bhutan holiday. Follow a trail from Paro to the Bumdra Monastery, high above the Paro Valley then descend to Taktsang Monastery by a little trekked path. Enjoy high mountain views and spend a night camping below beautiful Bumdra Monastery. The fully supported trek includes a guide, trek crew, all camping equipment.





## Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

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- This first class cultural tour of the Kingdom of Bhutan is unique to Mountain Kingdoms with plenty of time allowed to enjoy the many highlights that the country has to offer.
- We use premium quality hotels in both Kathmandu and Bhutan that offer the very best character, comfort and facilities.
- Each departure is tied into a Bhutanese festival. They are highly atmospheric, interesting, colourful and exciting events.
- We include a thrilling Everest flight for fabulous close-up views of the world's highest mountain.
- We have been pioneering holidays in Bhutan for over 30 years. Our M.D. Steve Berry, is one of the leading authorities on Bhutan in the travel industry and has written two books about his experiences in the Thunder Dragon Kingdom.
- Many members of the Mountain Kingdoms team have travelled extensively in Bhutan. If you have any questions about any aspect of this holiday please don't hesitate to give us a call on 01453 844400 or email [info@mountainkingdoms.com](mailto:info@mountainkingdoms.com).
- Our maximum group size is 12 for this trip. This provides for a genuine small group travel experience and helps reduce the negative aspects often associated with larger groups.
- We offer a flexible service and can extend your holiday with extra hotel nights, upgrades and exciting activities.
- We are an IATA accredited agent and work directly with some of the world's major airlines. 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 Manager, April, 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](http://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

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## **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](http://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.

# Mountain Kingdoms & Responsible Tourism

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## Our commitment

Mountain Kingdoms is committed to responsible tourism, through policies and practices which permeate all aspects of its business. Our policies aim to ensure that we and our clients act in a way which is socially, environmentally and culturally sound. We feel strongly that all Mountain Kingdoms holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment by minimising pollution, and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. We tread lightly - low volume, low impact trekking/touring is the best way of preserving the beautiful and fragile places we visit.

We work with organisations such as Tourism Concern, International Porter Protection Group (IPPG), Ecoan, AITO and various charities, to help achieve our responsible tourism goals.

## Our initiatives

We support a range of projects around the world both on an ongoing basis and in response to disasters and emergencies.

Examples of our recent ongoing work are the Kerala Partnership helping flood victims in southern India, the Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service in Ethiopia, the Ginette Harrison School in Nepal, a tree planting project in Peru, the Village Education Project in Kilimanjaro and Kidasha charity supporting children in crisis in Nepal, and many more.



If you know of a registered charity that does good 'hands on' work in a country that we operate in please send us details and we will consider adding it to the list of charities we support.

Further details of all our Responsible Tourism initiatives can be found at [www.mountainkingdoms.com/about/responsible-travel](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com/about/responsible-travel)

## 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.

Depending on the holiday booked, clients travelling with us may be eligible for a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle (please see the What the Price Includes section of this itinerary), or to purchase a bottle from us at a discounted rate. For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>.

## Porter Protection

In the countries where we use porters we feel that the issue of porter protection is immensely important. We support the work and the aims of the IPPG (International Porter Protection Group) and as such we have a set of guidelines to adhere to and which we apply worldwide.



## Carbon off-setting

Working with Ecoan tree-planting project in Southern Peru we offset the carbon emissions for every Mountain Kingdoms holiday that includes an international flight.



