

# Gangkar Punsum Wilderness Exploration Trek, Bhutan

Epic trekking through the remote mountains of Bhutan.



## Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

## Holiday overview

Style	Trek
Accommodation	Hotels, Camping
Grade	Strenuous
Duration	25 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	On trek: 15 days Walks on: 1 day
Min/Max group size	5 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 5
Trip Leader	Local Leader Bhutan
Land only	Joining in Kathmandu, Nepal
Max altitude	5,421m/17,785ft approximately, Zhigeyphu Valley, Days 12-14

**Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available**



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# Group Departure Dates and Prices

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## Group departures

### 2026 Dates:

Sat 03 Oct - Tue 27 Oct

### 2027 Dates:

Sat 02 Oct - Wed 27 Oct

This is the detailed itinerary for our 2026 departure. A separate itinerary for 2027 can be downloaded from our website or requested from the Mountain Kingdoms office.

## Group prices

Visit the holiday page of our website for up-to-date land only and flight inclusive prices for all group departure dates: <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/holiday/gangkar-punsum-wilderness-exploration-trek>. Single supplement options can also be found here.

## 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 5 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

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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.

## Your trip highlights

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- Experience a wild, remote trek to the base of the highest peak in Bhutan, Gangkar Punsum, 7,550m/24,770ft
- Be the first to explore some of the valleys, cols, ridges and lakes of the southern foot of Gangkar Punsum
- Explore new country at the head of the Chamkar Chhu valley, within shouting distance of the huge peaks on the Tibetan Border
- Meet local yak herders and their families and experience something of their way of life
- Watch out for tracks of the Yeti - previously seen in the region
- Exit via a different route over the Thole La Pass
- Have this area all to yourselves!!

## At a glance itinerary

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Days 1-2	Fly to Kathmandu.
Days 3-5	Fly to Paro. Drive to Thimphu and Jakar. Day at leisure in Jakar.
Day 6	Drive to Tangbi and begin trek.
Days 7-8	Trek to Gophu and on to Tsawuu.
Days 9-11	Trek to Shingo and Bamurpa. Day trek from Bamurpa to Buurtsam.
Days 12-14	Trek to the Zhigeyphu Valley. Two days of exploration around the valley.
Days 15-17	Trek to Tsho Shap with visit to Tsampa Monastery en route.
Days 18-19	Cross the Thole La pass. Trek to Tashi Sa and Chokchum.
Days 20-21	End trek at Dur. Drive to Punakha.
Day 22	Drive to Paro. Walk to Taktsang Monastery.
Days 23-25	Fly to Kathmandu. Time at leisure. Fly to London.

## Trip summary

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Gangkar Punsum at 7,550m/24,770ft is the highest mountain in Bhutan and also happens to be the highest unclimbed peak in the world. It sits astride Bhutan's northern border with Tibet and the mountain and surrounding region has received very few visitors. This exciting trek is a thrilling exploration of the largely unexplored mountains and valleys on the southern side of Gangkar Punsum.

After driving to Jakar in central Bhutan, you trek north out of the valley, through wild country to the base of Gangkar Punsum, with time to explore the remote Zhigeyphu valley, an incredibly beautiful valley which few westerners have ever seen, let alone explored. You have two full days to investigate and enjoy this wild country and the fabulous views of Gankar Punsum, and perhaps even to hunt for the elusive 'yeti'. You then return to Jaka by way of an exhilarating crossing of the largely untrodden Thole La Pass at 4,766m/15,537ft. Joining this extraordinary trek you will be a real pioneer and one of the very first to set foot in this magical region!

This is a tough trek and should only be attempted by clients in an excellent state of health and fitness. Having said this, it is an extremely worthwhile objective and you will be able to truly say that you have trekked to one of the very remotest parts of the Himalaya.

### Steve Berry's Gangkar Punsum

There have been very few attempts to climb Gangkar Punsum, none successful. In 1986 our M.D. Steve Berry, was lucky enough to secure a permission to attempt the mountain by its south west ridge reaching approximately 22,500ft before bad weather dashed their hopes of the summit. Before that time, the first climbing team with permission went there in 1985, an American expedition sponsored by Rolex, who actually failed to get to the base camp. Also in 1985 a Japanese team made a creditable attempt but failed when one of their climbers became seriously ill with high altitude sickness and they helicoptered out. An Austrian expedition tried in the monsoon of 1986 but only got to about 20,000ft and finally, in 1998 a Japanese team secured a permit from China to attempt the peak from the north, but Bhutan objected, and the permit was withdrawn. Instead, in 1999, the Japanese climbers climbed a subsidiary mountain in Tibet called Liankang Kangri, which is close to Gangkar Punsum and connected to it by a high ridge. In recent years, following protests from local

people in Lunana, the Royal Government of Bhutan has closed all its major peaks to mountaineers, which means that the last expedition to attempt Gangkar Punsum was Steve Berry's own team in 1986. If you are interested in seeing more of Steve's expedition there is a film on the video page of our website for this holiday.

Steve Berry has been back to base camp once since 1986. He trekked there with a group of hardy adventurers in 1998, exiting through Lunana, and came close again to Gangkar Punsum when trekking through Lunana in 1989. Then in 2014 and 2015 Steve led two groups following this itinerary. On both occasions the group found strange tracks indicating the presence of a bipedal creature living in the high mountains. Steve also returned in 2016 to the other side of the mountain and other members of the party found more tracks. Watch 'Footsteps in the Snow' on our website for more detail.

In 2017 Steve went back yet again but this time with a film crew to produce a fascinating documentary film for the Animal Planet channel.

## Mysterious snow tracks

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In October 2014 Mountain Kingdoms MD, Steve Berry, trekked to the base of the world's highest unclimbed mountain, Gangkar Punsum, 7,550m/24,770ft, during which a mysterious discovery was made. Watch 'Footsteps in the Snow' on our website for more details.



### Special notes

#### Flights between Kathmandu and Paro

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

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### Day 1: Depart London.

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Depart London on your overnight flight to Kathmandu.

**Overnight: In flight**

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### Day 2: Arrive Kathmandu. Group transfer to hotel.

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You will be met on arrival at the airport and transferred to your hotel. You may choose to eat here tonight or venture out into nearby Thamel with its many bars and restaurants.

**Overnight: Hotel Shanker or Similar, Kathmandu**

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### Day 3: Fly to Paro, 2,200m/7,218ft. Drive to Thimphu - 2,321m/7,615 ft - 1½-2 hours.

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Transfer for the flight to Paro, the country's main airstrip, 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. Try to sit on the left hand side of the plane. You will be met on arrival by your Bhutanese guide and driver. You then make the journey from Paro to Thimphu, the compact capital city of Bhutan, where you spend the night.



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

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### Day 4: Drive to Jakar - 8-9 hours.

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After breakfast you leave Paro to make the long but scenic drive east to Jakar, which is situated in the centre of Bhutan.

**Overnight: Ugyenling Hotel or Similar, Jakar (Meals: BLD)**

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### Day 5: Day at leisure in Jakar.

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The slightly sleepy town of Jakar is the main town in the district of Bumthang. The region consists mainly of three interconnecting valleys and is renowned for being the holiest area of the kingdom. Jakar has its own monastery fortress or Dzong (the Castle of the White Bird) which is believed to have been constructed by Lam Ngagi Wangchuck (1517- 554). He was a Tibetan monk who came to Bhutan to spread the Drukpa Kagyupa Buddhist teachings.

There are many options for this day, and there are many interesting walks to choose from. Your Guide will take you on a circular hike through one or two nearby villages, and to see some of the historic temples. This will likely include Kurjey Lhakang which is the final resting place of the first three kings of Bhutan.

**Overnight: Ugyenling Hotel or Similar, Jakar (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 6: Drive beyond Toktu Zampa to Tangbi, 2,640m/8,662ft. Trek to before Khakthang army camp, 2,834m/9,297ft - 5 1/2 hours.**

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Today you start your trek. It is a half hour drive from Jakar to Tangbi crossing the river on the suspension bridge. On arrival at Tangbi you will meet your trek crew, horsemen and horses. Exciting stuff as the lads start loading the animals with all the equipment, supplies and your main bags. Every journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step!

You begin your trek by following the left bank of the river through cultivated farmland and hamlets, following a rough jeep track. There are some beautiful examples of typical Bhutanese farmhouses, as well as one or two temples and water driven prayer wheels. In under 2 hours you come opposite Drapham Dzong. You will just make this out as ruined fortifications on top of a small hill. In recent years some archaeological work has been done here apparently. Just beyond here you cross the river on a foot bridge and then back track down the valley on the opposite bank to visit Nga Lakhthang, 2,786m/9,141ft. It is about half an hour back down from the bridge to the temple. Nga Lakhthang dates back to the 7th century when it was built by the lama Namkha Samdrup. There is a young man living here called Wangyal. Apparently his wife's family and her ancestors have looked after the temple since the 7th century. Wangyal married into the family, which like many Bhutanese families follow a tradition of passing the property down through the female line. This is a good place to have a picnic lunch.

You return to the bridge in half an hour and cross it, and carry on for another half hour to cross a small bridge to Nathe village. Just beyond here there is a large monastery quite high up on the hill. You are now beginning to leave civilization behind and entering into forest and jungle. In any case it's only another half hour to the camp situated before an interesting chorten with a tall prayer flag. This is a very short distance before the army camp.

The army camp is just a small post where people's permits are examined. At certain times of the year local people are given permits to travel further up the Chamkha Chhu valley to collect cordyceps. Collecting cordyceps is big business in the Himalaya! Basically, it is a caterpillar that is killed by a particular type of fungus and it is believed to have extremely potent medicinal properties. In Bhutan the traditional collecting grounds of cordyceps are carefully controlled, hence the small army post.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 7: Trek to Gophu or Kuphu Camp, 3,276m/ 10,748ft - 7 hours.**

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If a camera trap was set last night you will probably have captured lots of pictures of horses. Hopefully you might obtain pictures of more interesting things higher up on the trek.

You are now walking through the most beautiful virgin forest alongside the noisy turbulent river constantly cascading down rapids. After 2 hours you come to a new wooden bridge at a river junction, 2,949m/9,659ft. You are basically gently ascending all day within a gorge that squeezes and squeezes. There are impressive rocky peaks and cliffs framed at the end of the valley. It is a great feeling to be out in the wild and away from human habitation. About 3 hours into the trek you come to a campsite called Tsho Zhou, further on there is a girder bridge and there are two rather smart wooden chalets behind a palisade fence. This is where the Royal Family stay before they climb up to the 'high route'.



**The High Route**

Apparently there are some very special meditation temples at Chungge and Lungsipang. You have to have special permits to take this route, but in any case it would not be good for acclimatisation as it involves 1,500m of ascent.

Opposite the wooden chalets there are some very impressive cliffs and some short vertical cliffs on the left hand side with a swampy meadow. You will aim to camp at Gophu (sometimes called Kuphu).

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 8: Trek to Tsawuu, 3,849m/12,627ft, beyond Tsampa - 8 hours.**

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A stunning walk on the right hand side of the river with beetling cliffs and great roaring rapids. Parts of the trail are a bit boggy and slippery in a couple of places. The further up the trail you go the more impressive the facing cliffs become. After about 4 hours you come to a 'lake' where the river funnels into a very narrow slot forcing a lake to form. You might see ducks here. You are climbing up now through sloping meadows where you might encounter herds of yaks. Incidentally look out for any white yaks. They are thought to be 'lucky' and are more valuable than your common-or-garden black yaks! Finally you come to a three pronged valley junction. Off to your right is the last small army outpost and the valley leading to the Mon La Karchung La. This is the pass leading into Tibet that F.M. Bailey and Captain M.R.C. Meade crossed in 1922. It was their survey work from the top of the pass that fixed the height for Gangkar Punsum. The left prong of the valley leads further up to the source of the Chamkha Chhu River. Sitting on a shoulder of the mountain at this junction of rivers is a small and ancient temple. Two of the statues were recently donated by one of the queens of the 4th king.

Trees have all but disappeared by now and rugged mountains are a welcome sight. You might want to visit the army camp to see the rough conditions that the soldiers live in on their two month tour of duty. From there it is a short distance to cross a wooden cantilevered bridge leading to the temple. It would be good to offer prayers here before continuing for another hour to reach camp at the small hamlet of Tsawuu some way beyond the junction which is called Tsampa.

It is not always possible to camp at Tsawuu in which case you may camp next to the river below the temple at Tsampa.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 9: Trek to Shingo, 4,209m/13,808ft - 4½ hours.**

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To aid acclimatisation there are now two short days. The first to Shingo only takes 4½ hours. It is getting really exciting now and if the weather is clear you will see framed at the end of the valley the huge peaks on the Tibetan border. Leaving camp you soon plunge back into the forest and shortly climb for quite a long way uphill. Eventually you come to a 'shoulder' with prayer flags and an old square chorten (30 mins from camp). Shortly after this there is a 'yak gateway'. Local people build these either from stone and timbers and/or felled trees to keep the yaks from straying too far. Trees now give way to open hillside and you traverse for some way even descending a little to meet the river again. Rounding a corner you come to a large meadow with four yak herder huts. This is Gewathang (1 hour 10 mins from camp). You should meet very friendly, shy people who will be astonished to see these strange foreigners!

From here you cross a meadow and enter an enchanted forest. Very pretty indeed. It is perhaps another half hour to a second yak gate. You are nearly out of the forest again and there is some proper boulder hopping through rhododendron and juniper. More herds of yaks for sure. After 2½ hrs you come to another group of four to five yak huts called Shewwa, 3,905m/12,812ft. Another 30 mins and you come to a third yak gate. After 4½ hrs you arrive at Shingo having traversed a long way under some seriously impressive rock cliffs on your right hand side. The river is now your close companion again on your left. At Shingo there are another four stone/wooden huts.

It is interesting that there is a strong tradition with all the local people that they take all their herds of yaks to the topmost pastures in the summer months. Each family knows its own particular yak huts and the area their yaks are allowed to graze. In the autumn they move downwards in an orderly way, each family moving down on certain dates to avoid their herd of yaks having fights with other herds of yaks.

At Shingo hot washing water can be organised for the shower tent and washing clothes or you might like to go on short walks to explore the locality.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 10: Trek to Bamurpa, 4,490m/ 14,730ft - 4 hours.**

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There are now some astounding views of the peaks at the head of the valley. The biggest of these is Melunghi Gang 7,000m/22,965ft. A Japanese expedition requested permission to climb this peak but were refused. It still remains unclimbed.



Another thankfully short day all of which aids acclimatisation, just 4 hours to Bamurpa. Leaving camp there is an easy angled rise to some prayer flags on a shoulder 10 minutes from camp. You then drop down to the river and begin to turn the slight right hand corner keeping to the right of the stream. The trees have all disappeared now and there are easy grass slopes, boulder fields, wild azalea, stunted juniper and carpets of bright blue gentians. 20 minutes from the prayer flags you come to another yak gate and beyond it more prayer flags. The Chamkha Chhu valley is spread out below you and hemmed in by grey granite peaks, steep mountain sides, rock gullies and enticing side valleys. The main river is still a powerful torrent and joined here and there by side streams. Autumn colours add to the beauty. You may well see herds of Blue Sheep here.

After 25 minutes you come to another set of four or five yak herder huts with buildings on both sides of the river. You reach another yak gate after half an hour beyond this after climbing a slope. The next set of yak herder huts at Cedi is half an hours walk ahead. Beyond there again after half an hour you come to two rock boulder enclosures, probably for keeping animals safe at night.

Having turned the corner you are now heading directly up the valley towards the wall of snow and ice at the end. After a bit of boggy land you come to Bamurpa. This is a large flat area with a meadow the size of half a dozen football pitches, just away from the river with again three or four yak herder huts. The impressive rock peaks here have serrated tops with occasional leaning towers and unusual tottering pinnacles.

Another afternoon to rest and relax, or look for an interesting place for the camera trap. If it is a clear night spend a little time before turning in to do a bit of shooting star spotting.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 11: Explore to beyond Buurtsam - possible max altitude 4,800m/15,750ft - and return to Bamurpa - 6 hours.**

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With a long slow ascent to altitude you should be nicely acclimatised, and today you can make an exploration right up towards Melunghi Gang. You should reach an altitude of around 4,900m/16,000ft. As far as we know our 2014 group were the first Brits to set foot in this area. There are no records but we think only the American mountaineering expedition in 1985 have been up here before us. There were rumours of a USA company, Geo Adventure, but no one is quite sure what they did.

You will get your first views of Gangkar Punsum as you just see parts of the summit ridge off to the west. You will also see a string of beautiful peaks running off to the east towards the Mon La Karchung La.

First thing in the morning you will probably hear Himalayan Pheasant not far from camp, and during the day you may well see large birds of prey cruising the thermals and even smaller falcons hovering on ridges. You should see Blue Sheep again with luck.

For this day we suggest walking up the right hand side of the river. There are only indistinct occasional paths and you just have to follow your nose. On a previous expedition, Steve Berry's group made the mistake of traversing the right hand slopes quite high above the valley floor. They found this to be slow hard work and it would probably be better to stay closer to the river and head straight for the moraine. Their high point was on the crest of part of the moraine at a height of 4,800m/15,750ft. However, if you make faster progress than they did you could certainly go on further from here if time and energy allowed.

If you do follow up beside the river you will eventually come to Buurtsam, a group of about six stone house/yak herder huts in a dilapidated state with no roofs.

Certainly you should be rewarded with very up close and personal views of Melunghi Gang and its neighbours. You look down on huge glaciers, and straight ahead at extremely steep and frighteningly difficult looking mountain sides. A magnificent day!

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 12: Trek to Zhigeyphu Valley, 4,994m/16,384ft - 5 hours.**

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Zhigeyphu valley is an incredibly beautiful region that very few westerners have ever seen, let alone explored. The main valley system leads almost directly towards Gangkar Punsum and on the western side of the region is a line of mountains beyond which we know lies the Mangde Chhu valley system. In 1986 Mountain Kingdoms' M.D. Steve Berry led a British expedition to try and climb Gangkar Punsum and their approach to the mountain was up the Mangde Chhu. When Steve and companions went back in 2014 they had hoped to perhaps find a connecting pass from Zhigeyphu valley through to the Mangde Chhu side. The one pass they did reach (the closest to Gangkar Punsum) did not provide a viable route through but there are four or five other 'passes' that could be explored to see where they lead.

There is so much to do but the first thing having reached your base camp in Zhigeyphu valley is to climb one of the adjoining ridges that will give you a very fine overview of the area. In any event, today is all about getting to the base camp at a place called Zhigeyphu. It is not a long day only 4 or 5 hours, but it feels like quite a long uphill climb.

Leaving camp you first have to wade across the river. This is not too difficult but cold! You then walk the short distance back down the river to the yak huts opposite Bamurpa. From here sandy zigzags lead up the front of a ridge to prayer flags. The path then starts to traverse into the upper reaches of Zhigeyphu valley. After about 2 hours you come to some more yak herder stone houses (724m/15,500ft) and another hour on from here you come to the top of a rise (4,916m/16,130ft). Just ahead of you there are more prayer flags and a 'pass' (approximately 5,000m/16,500ft). This really is the true 'entrance' to Zhigeyphu valley. Just down from here is a very nice campsite next to three yak herder huts and three enclosures. If the weather is clear you have the most extraordinary view of Gangkar Punsum.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 13: Explore Zhigeyphu Valley.**

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Ask your guide to wake you early for dawn views of Gangkar Punsum. Spectacular! To your north there are a rounded series of ridges and climbing to the top of the ones immediately north of camp will provide extremely valuable acclimatisation and give you an overview.

From your base it's about 45 mins slowly uphill to the first cairn, 5,184m/17,008ft, and is then a long slow but gradual uphill hike to the top of the ridge. This will take you a further 35 - 45 mins. Hopefully the set of prayer flags and chortens that we built in 2014 are still there. The top of the ridge forms a sort of 'corner' and has a height of 5,421m/17,785ft. The views from here are both breath-taking and humbling. Childlike excitement might be what you

experience at this point at the thought of so much beautiful country to explore. From here, assuming a clear day of course, you can see the various possible 'passes' that might lead through to the Mangde Chhu valley system to the west. You will also be able to pick out at least eleven lakes scattered throughout Zhigeyphu valley and there are almost certainly more than that hidden away in corners of the region as a whole. Strangely you occasionally see two or even three lakes next to each other each one with a different colour. Strange but true!

Worth mentioning here are the incredible 'hard' mosses, lichens, strange plants, and stunted ferns that cover the hillsides here. Truly extraordinary and beautiful. Some of the large mosses are so hard you can stand on them!

Descending from your high point you can actually keep over to the western edge of the ridge you are on and drop down to the obvious huge circular turquoise lake. This must be a holy place as there are several lots of prayer flags around the edge of the lake, the main group being quite elaborate. There is a local legend that says a mermaid lives in the lake. Another legend tells how in the sixteen hundreds there was an intelligent raven living near Gangkar Punsum who, seeing a Tibetan army gathering to attack Bhutan, flew to Bumthang



and warned the Bhutanese of their danger. The Raven Crown that the kings wear on ceremonial occasions is connected with this legend. From here it is less than two hours back to camp.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 14: Further exploration in Zhigeyphu Valley.**

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So many options, so little time! You could for instance attempt to hike to the top of the obvious rocky mountain south of the camp. Our 2014 party felt sure it could be done in a day with an early start. Alternatively you could explore one of the side valleys, or indeed have a look at some of the 'passes' that might possibly lead through to the Mangde Chuu valley. No doubt a democratic planning meeting on the evening of day 12 will have focused your ambitions. Remember to allow plenty of time to get back to camp before dark, but in any case pack a head torch just in case.

In 2014 Steve Berry and party reached a high col, nearest to Gangkar Punsum, and it was here that the Bhutanese Guide Karma Tenzing spotted the strange set of tracks that are pictured later in this itinerary. Do watch 'Footsteps in the Snow' on our website for a detailed explanation!

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 15: Trek to clearing in forest beyond the Shingo Bridge, 4,072m/13,358ft - 5½ hours.**

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A sad farewell has to be made, and you have to turn your back on this beautiful place. Amazingly it only takes about 2 hours to drop back down to the yak herder huts next to the river. However, instead of crossing the river it is best to stay on the right hand bank going down. You may stop for lunch opposite Sedi. Incidentally just after leaving camp and at the prayer flagged 'pass' look out to the distant mountains on the horizon with binoculars to spot an amazing rock tower. Most unusual! Bigger at the top than at the bottom. Quite bizarre! About an hour on from lunch you come to the main bridge across the river and just down from that is the campsite in a clearing.



**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 16: Trek to Tsampa. Visit monastery. Camp by river, 3,720m/12,205ft - 3½ hours.**

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A nice short, easy day down to Tsampa. 15 minutes from camp you come to a yak gate and after that three yak huts and enclosures in a large clearing next to the river. This is a further half hour from the yak gate. Just 20 mins on from here there is a place where sulphurous water bubbles up from the ground. It is marked by a prayer flag and there is a silver mug left beside the bubbling water for people to drink the efficacious waters. After this there is a short uphill to a gully with a stream and immediately afterwards another yak gate. 40 mins on from here you come to more yak huts where the lady of the house might like to sell you some hand woven belts. Another hour and a half down through the forest and you will arrive at Tsampa, where you might like to visit the monastery again. Dropping down from here it is just a few mins to cross the river by a substantial bridge and make camp in a clearing next to the river.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 17: Trek to Tsho Shap, 4,420m/14,501ft - 5½ hours.**

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Leaving camp you climb up to join the track that will eventually take you over the Thole La pass. Having joined the main trail you now have a steep set of zigzags uphill, next to some impressive cliffs. Looking out and back you can see the army post, the valley leading to the Mon La Karchung La and the temple. Carry on steeply uphill and eventually you come out above the tree line and traverse a stunningly beautiful V valley with some beautiful peaks at the end, the main one of which looks like a castle out of Mordor. This is the essence of Bhutan and you will almost certainly meet local people and their yaks. Previously, Steve's group met a pair of Tibetan lamas who had crossed illicitly from India into Bhutan and were trying to make their way into Tibet.

This is a lovely walk up the right hand side of the valley with lots of autumn colours and many of the hillsides completely swathed in rhododendron. Flocks of rock pigeon have acrobatic fun and we called them 'the Red Sparrows'!

After 2½ hours you come to a col with one ruined house and two enclosures, 4,090m/13,418ft. Less than 2½ hrs further on you come to three yak herder huts and prayer flags and the valley turns left here. It is only another 40 minutes to come to the magical camp next to the edge of the lake of Tsho Shap.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 18: Cross the Thole La pass, 4,766m/15,637ft. Trek to Tashi Sa just beyond Labrong, 4,117m/13,506ft - 6 hours.**

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A big day! To our certain knowledge 'foreigners' have never been this way, and it is a real thrill to have this place to yourself. Again stunning scenery and all the pleasure of achieving the crossing of a high pass. Firstly, boulder hop to cross the stream issuing from the lake (take care as early in the morning the rocks can be icy). You then follow a vague path along the side of the lake at the far end of which is a single yak herders hut. From here it is a steep climb to the Thole La, but only 2 hrs from camp and if you are lucky enough to have a clear day, the views are outstanding. From the pass if you have a map and a good compass you can pick out the peak of Kula Kangri in Tibet. This is the other huge peak that sits behind Gangkar Punsum. Turn round and you are basically looking south over Bhutan. Ahead and below you is a huge valley with a river in the bottom which disappears in the distance. This is the way you are now heading. However just look to the west and you can just pick out a zigzag path the locals say leads through to the hot springs at Dur Tsachu.



Reluctantly you now leave the pass and follow the path diving steeply down to the floor of a huge valley. It is some 427m/1,400ft of descent. At the bottom of the descent there is a deserted yak hut which makes a good picnic venue.

From lunch you follow the river on its left hand side going down past huge grey granite mountains on either side. On the first rock face on the right hand side is perched a huge balanced tower of rock and having gone past and looking back it sort of disappears into the face and can no longer be picked out. Again the path is boggy in places and there are a couple of places where it is easier to boulder hop down the shallow stream bed. Incidentally, always keep your eyes open for interesting or unusual animal prints. It was around here where we came across some bear prints, but up in Zhigeyphu valley we saw some very clear prints that must have been a snow leopard or even perhaps a tiger. Good possibilities of spotting Blue Sheep in this area. About 5½ hrs from camp you come to the bridge at Labrong. Cross this but continue to traverse down the hillside for another half hour to a place called Tashi Sa. As you traverse this path on the mountainside it doesn't seem possible that there is a campsite but it is 'hidden'.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 19: Trek to Chokchum, 3,247m/10,652ft - 6½ hours.**

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From camp it is about 45 mins back down into the jungle to reach the junction. If you were to turn right here it would take you to Tsochenchen, then over the Dhule La, down to the hot springs at Dur Satchu, and from there on to Gangkar Punsum Base Camp on the Mangde Chuu side. However you are now on your way out back down to Bumthang and 20 minutes from the junction you come to a bridge. From here it is about 2½ hours to Kurzang's rather muddy campsite which you will pass by. There is a wooden shelter there. Further on down there is a riverside cliff path and 5 hours from camp you reach the main bridge that takes you to the other side. It is then about an hours steep slog up through the forest to get to the camp at Chokchum. This is a clearing high up on the right hand side of the river. Tonight is your last night camping.

**Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 20: Trek to Dur, 2,700m/8,858ft - 4 hours. Drive to Jakar.**

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The last of your fifteen days on trek and your tired legs will be looking forward to a rest and the thought of a bath and a comfortable bed to sleep in is somewhat attractive. Be aware there are some famous mud sections on the trail today though it is always possible to bypass the worst of it. Don't let us put you off. This is still a good and interesting walk through prime untouched forest with one or two fantastic sections next to the river. Eventually 'civilization' begins to appear. You see fields, meet people and encounter proper paths and houses. At Dur there is a suspension bridge and on the other side a large chorten. We recommend you do at least three Koras to thank the gods for your safe return. Then congratulations all round are in order and if you are lucky the boys with the bus have brought some beer and sandwiches. It is now time to make some speeches and hand out tips to your cool, hardworking gang of Bhutanese staff and horsemen. Then all that remains is a half hour drive to the lodge in Jakar.

**Overnight: Ugyenling Hotel or Similar, Jakar (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 21: Drive to Punakha - 5-6 hours.**

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Over the next two days you will return to Paro. Today you drive as far as Punakha famous for its beautiful, riverside dzong.

**Overnight: Zhingkhram Resort or Similar, Punakha (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 22: Drive to Paro - 3½ hours. Walk to view Taktsang Monastery - 4 hours.**

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After breakfast you will complete your drive back to Paro, giving you ample time in the afternoon to make the walk up to Taktsang Monastery - the famous Tiger's Nest.

The trailhead for Taktsang lies just a short drive beyond Paro town. 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, fled from Tibet on the back of a tiger to defeat five demons, who were opposing the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan. It is 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 that 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 in any case, 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.



You descend back to the valley floor by your outward route. The full walk to Taktsang and back involves approximately 740m/2,428ft of ascent and takes about 4 hours. You will be driven back to your hotel in Paro and the remainder of the day is free.

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

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**Day 23: Fly to Kathmandu. Transfer to hotel.**

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You will be transferred to the airport where you will bid farewell to your guide and driver. Then once again you will enjoy the sensational take-off and scenic Himalayan flight past Chomolhari, Bhutan's second highest peak, past Kangchenjunga and Everest back to Kathmandu, where you transfer back to your hotel.

**Overnight: Hotel Shanker or Similar, Kathmandu (Meals: B)**

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## Day 24: At leisure in Kathmandu. Depart for London

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You will have time at leisure in Kathmandu today when you may do some sightseeing or shopping or simply relax at your hotel. Later there will be a group transfer to the airport for your overnight flight to the UK.

**Overnight: In flight (Meals: B)**

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## Day 25: Arrive London.

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## Our grading system

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Gangkar Punsum Wilderness Exploration Trek is graded as a Strenuous trekking holiday, as described below.

### **Strenuous**

Our strenuous trekking holidays can involve anything from 10 to 30 days on trek and are often in remote areas, far from 'civilisation'. Rest days are interspersed but there may be up to 7 consecutive days of hard walking. Most treks reach altitudes of at least 4,900m/16,000ft and there will be a great deal of ascent and descent. The majority of our strenuous treks utilise camping, tea house or mountain lodge accommodation.

These holidays are suitable for fit individuals who have regular experience of mountain walking.

## Trip altitude

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**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.

## 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:

- ✓ 22 x breakfasts, 20 x lunches, 20 x dinners
- ✓ 4\* hotel in Kathmandu, on a twin-share, bed and breakfast basis
- ✓ Good standard hotels in Bhutan on twin-share, full board basis
- ✓ Full service camping on trek (tents on a twin-share basis)
- ✓ An English-speaking Bhutanese leader
- ✓ 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
- ✓ All flights between Kathmandu and Paro and domestic transfers
- ✓ Bhutan visa and Bhutan departure tax
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ The use of a good quality down jacket and sleeping bag (when travelling to Bhutan via Kathmandu).
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free high-quality Mountain Kingdoms kit bag

### 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:

- ✗ Nepal visa fee
- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Optional trips
- ✗ Lunch and dinner in Kathmandu
- ✗ 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

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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:



#### Hotel Shanker or Similar, Kathmandu

The Shanker is a 4\* heritage hotel situated just a 10-15 minute walk from the tourist area of Thamel. It has an outdoor swimming pool, a spa and a lovely garden, plus a choice of restaurants and bars. Rooms are large, elegant and well-equipped. The hotel is a converted royal palace with a fascinating history which in recent years has undergone a thorough and tasteful renovation.



#### 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.



#### Ugyenling Hotel or Similar, Jakar

Nestled in a picturesque setting facing the Bumthang valley and river, the Ugyenling has well-appointed rooms with a seating area warmed by a bukhari (wood burning stove). Rooms also offer tea/coffee making facilities and Wi-Fi as well as a sit-out balcony with views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. Set in a walled compound, the hotel has its own international restaurant, large bar and a traditional hot stone bath.



#### Camp

On our camping treks, the following are provided: a sleeping tent, a dining tent, a toilet tent exclusively for your group to use, and a kitchen tent. There are camp chairs or stools, a lamp for reading in the dining tent at night, a dining table, crockery and tableware. The staff put up and take down the tents, make the tea, cook the food, wash the dishes, and load the porters or pack animals. Your kit bag is carried for you either by porters or pack animals and you just trek with a light day sack.



#### Zhingkham Resort or Similar, Punakha

Overlooking Punakha Dzong, the Zhingkham Resort is one of the best 3\* hotels in Punakha. The well-proportioned, stylish rooms come complete with free Wi-Fi, minibars and coffee/tea making facilities as well as balconies giving picture-perfect views of the dzong and the surrounding hills and countryside.

## Meal arrangements

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22 x breakfasts, 20 x lunches, 20 x dinners. Bed and breakfast in Kathmandu and all meals 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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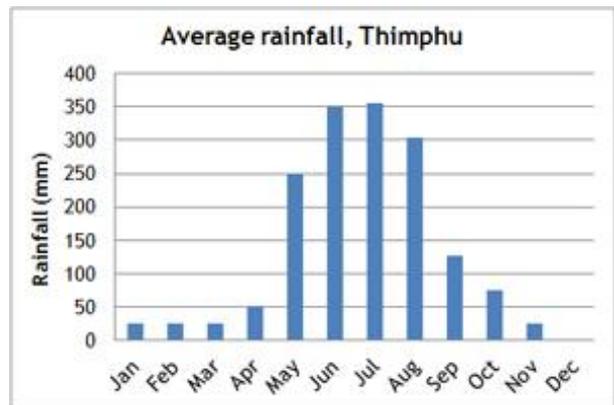
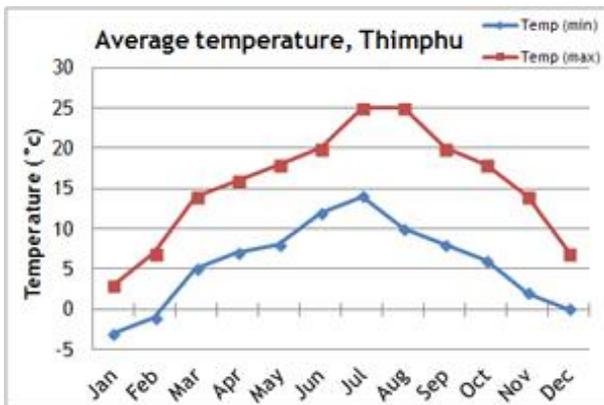
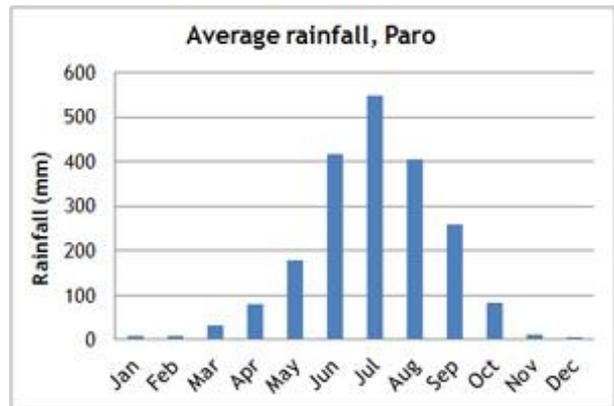
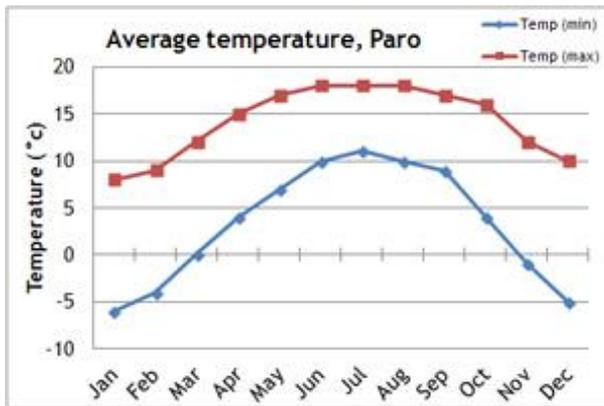
When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

## 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.

# Climate information



# 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.



### 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?

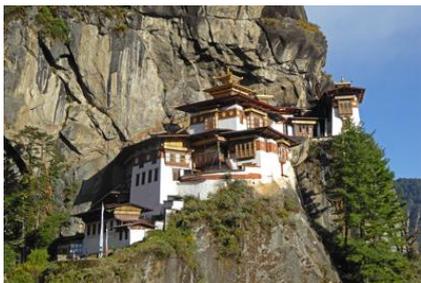
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- Our unique itinerary allows you to go exploring where even locals have not been, to be one of the first westerners to cross the Thole La pass and to meet local yak herders and experience something of their way of life.
- The trek is led by an experienced Bhutanese guide with the support of a trek crew.
- 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 trekked several times in this area of Bhutan. He would be happy to answer any questions you have. Call Steve on 01453 844400
- We carry a camera trap and take you to remote valleys where you can search for evidence of the elusive Yeti or other rare wildlife.
- 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 trekking 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](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.

## What our clients say

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*...So may I say now that we were very well supported by Karma Tenzin, Lotay and their team (Dorji, Phub Tshering and Dophu) and, indeed, the horsemen from Dur. Cooperation throughout the trek was exemplary and created a very happy spirit for all concerned. The meals were terrific and Lotay's skill is remarkable, ensuring that supplies were used steadily throughout the trek and most supplies lasted to the final day... The whole experience seems to be 'thought through'; timings, logistics, acclimatisation, supplies, staffing all fit; most comforting... Best wishes and thanks for a splendid trip.*

*- Mr. S, Surrey*



*What I liked about travelling with Mountain Kingdoms was that their client wellbeing is paramount, their long standing relationship with BTCL ensured a totally trouble free trip and the quality of hotels outside the trek. Thank you all for making the Gangkar Punsum trip such a memorably fantastic one. May our next adventures be so fortunate.*

*- Mr. F, Gloucestershire*



*I just wanted to say a big thank you for our Bhutan adventure. Truly a trip of a lifetime for all of us. I have really enjoyed looking at the photos and recounting all the tales to friends and family...All have been stunned by the scenery and the beauty of Bhutan.*

*- Mrs. M, Kincardineshire*

# 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.



## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT

For almost four decades, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now have trips to all corners of the globe but are conscious that our holidays can have a detrimental impact on the world around us and want to do all we can to reduce that.

We have focused our main responsible tourism efforts on reducing the carbon emissions produced by our holidays, and counterbalancing 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

Since 2007, we have donated a percentage of our client and staff flight costs to the Ecoan tree planting project in Peru. Ecoan are a trusted local NGO who use the funds directly to purchase seedling trees with the long-term goal of restoring 2.5 million acres of Andean land.

Ecoan maintains over 100 tree nurseries across Peru where their tree saplings are grown and then transported to planting sites during the rainy season. They use native trees such as the Polylepis, as these can survive at high altitudes. As well as sequestering carbon, they help protect against soil erosion, landslides and the effects of extreme weather on local crops. As such, they are enormously beneficial to the economic well-being of the surrounding communities. This is very much a community-led conservation project, with the local Quechuan people coming together to plant tens of thousands of saplings in the Andean highlands where they live. During the annual Queuña Raymi (tree festival), over 150,000 native trees can be planted in a single day!

For every person booking a long-haul, flight inclusive holiday with us, Ecoan can purchase and plant 20 trees in Peru, and for short-haul flights, 7 trees. Typically, we send over \$7,000 per year to Ecoan, which is over 7,000 trees.

### Reducing carbon emissions

- ✓ We offer the majority of our clients a free, filtered Water-to-Go bottle to help reduce the need for single-use plastic bottles during their travels.
- ✓ We predominantly use locally-owned hotels and guesthouses rather than multinational chains. In some of our destinations, such as Bhutan, we use homestays. Not only does this type of small-sized, locally-owned accommodation have a much-reduced carbon footprint, but it also helps support communities.
- ✓ We evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel-efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, choose direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We have stopped offering unnecessary optional flights, such as Everest sightseeing. We try to minimise internal flights where possible.
- ✓ We recycle as much of our office waste as possible and have introduced a client portal to reduce paperwork and to make it easier for clients to manage their trips online.

### Wider commitment to responsible and sustainable tourism

- ✓ We are signatories to the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside other like-minded travel companies to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.
- ✓ We will continue to support several charities with whom we have a long-standing relationship, such as Shiva Charity in Nepal.

Over the years, we have given sizeable payments to emergency relief when a disaster has occurred in the countries we operate in. We always try to ensure that these funds go directly to those who need them most to help rebuild their lives.

