

# Gentle Walking Bhutan with Black-necked Crane Festival

The best of Bhutan - gentle walks, cultural highlights, comfortable accommodation and a visit to a festival.



## Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

## Holiday overview

Style	Walking
Accommodation	Hotels
Grade	Gentle
Duration	16 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	Walks on: 8 days
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Leader Bhutan
Land only	Joining in Kathmandu, Nepal
Max altitude	3,990m/13,090ft, Cheli La, Day 12

**Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available**



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# Departures

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## Group departures

### 2023 Dates:

Fri 24 Feb - Sat 11 Mar	With Punakha Tsechu
Sat 25 Mar - Sun 09 Apr	With Paro Tsechu
Sat 23 Sep - Sun 08 Oct	With Thimphu Tsechu
<b>Sat 04 Nov - Sun 19 Nov</b>	<b>With Black-necked Crane Festival</b>
Thu 14 Dec - Fri 29 Dec	With Trongsa Tsechu

This is the detailed itinerary for our November 2023 departure only. Detailed itineraries for all other departures can be downloaded from our website or requested from the Mountain Kingdoms office.

### 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 +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. 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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- First rate accommodation in Bhutan using comfortable hotels and lodges
- Relax at Dwarika's hotel in Kathmandu - a unique heritage property
- Explore the cultural highlights of Bhutan including iconic Taktsang Temple
- Excellent and varied programme of gentle walks
- Attend the Black-necked crane Festival in Gangtey

## At a glance itinerary

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Day 1-2	Fly to Kathmandu.
Days 3-4	Fly to Paro. Sightseeing in Paro. Drive to Thimphu.
Day 5	Walk to Wangditse Monastery. Afternoon sightseeing in Thimphu.
Day 6	Drive to Punakha over the Dochu La. Visit Chimi Lhakhang. Drive to Talo and walk through village and on to Nobgang.
Day 7	Punakha Valley Walk and visit Punakha Dzong. Drive to Gangtey.
Day 8	Visit Black-necked Crane Festival. Drive to Trongsa.
Day 9-10	Drive to Chumey and valley walk. Drive to Jakar. Bumthang Valley walk and visit to Jakar Dzong.
Days 11-12	Fly to Paro. Drive to Haa Valley. Walk in Haa Valley and return to Paro.
Day 13	Walk to Taktsang Monastery.
Days 14-16	Fly to Kathmandu. Time at leisure. Fly to London.

## Trip summary

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The tiny Kingdom of Bhutan in the eastern Himalaya, or the 'Thunder Dragon Kingdom', successfully remained isolated from the outside world for very many centuries. Only at the time of the 4th King's Coronation (1974) was the first trickle of foreigners allowed in. Prior to the building of the road from India to Thimphu even visiting Indian presidents took six days on horseback to visit the King. It still remains a secretive Kingdom and the present 5th King is keen to preserve its unique customs and traditions.

Its history is a capsule of all that is mystical about the Himalaya; re-incarnate rulers, who used black magic to defeat Tibetan aggressors, lama-saints, who foretold the future and who fought demons opposed to the spread of Buddhism, and civil wars between powerful district governors, or penlops, who laid plot and counter-plot in an endless cycle of strife and assassinations.

This holiday offers the perfect introduction to Bhutan, for those who like to explore on foot! We have designed the itinerary to give you a wide variety of experiences though it will be an adventure enjoyed in comparative comfort because every night is spent either in a hotel or comfortable lodge. Each walk has an interesting objective taking you to fascinating temples, hermit retreats, old palaces, ancient villages or simply into lovely scenery. This is a holiday that will be enjoyed to the full by those who enjoy weekend walks in the British countryside. As well as the main walk, on certain days a gentler or harder walk may also be possible. On certain days it is also possible to opt out of the walk, enabling you to relax in or around your hotel or lodge. There are also exciting road journeys following twisting mountain roads and crossing high passes in your comfortable mini-coach. By its nature this is an adventure with plenty of varied walking in a place that is only just emerging into the 21st Century.

This departure also spends time at the Black-Necked Crane Festival in the Gangtey Valley which celebrates the annual arrival of these sacred birds.

### Special notes

#### Kathmandu - Paro flights

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

#### Paro-Jakar flights

The domestic flights to/from Paro/Jakar are weather dependent and there can be difficulties securing these flights, so you need to be prepared for the drive between these destinations if the flight does not operate. Our itineraries are planned to allow enough time for this road journey if flights are cancelled for any reason.



# 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. Transfer to hotel.

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You will be met and transferred to the luxurious and stylish Dwarika's Hotel which is filled with Nepalese wooden carvings and statues and has a superb restaurant where you can eat in traditional style. It also has a cool, elegant courtyard and a swimming pool. After the long flight from London there's no better place to relax.

**Overnight: Dwarika's Hotel, Kathmandu**

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## Day 3: Fly to Paro, 2,200m/7,218ft. Sightseeing as time permits.

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After breakfast you will 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 and Kangchenjunga, but particularly exciting is the approach through the Bhutanese foothills and the landing, including a few steep turns to land at the tiny airstrip of Paro. Although you are at the mercy of the airline computer, if possible try to sit on the left hand side of the plane for the most spectacular views.

In Paro you will be met by your Bhutanese guide and transferred to your hotel. Depending on the flight schedule you may have time for a little sightseeing or exploration of the town on arrival.

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

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## Day 4: Sightseeing in Paro Valley. Drive to Thimphu and visit giant Buddha statue.

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Today's sightseeing in Paro will begin at the ancient temple of Kyichu Lakhang which was one of 108 temples built by Songtsen Gampo an important early Tibetan king, to pin down the Bon demon who was thought to hover over the whole of Tibet. Afterwards you will visit Paro Dzong and

You will then visit the huge Paro Dzong, one of the most important in the kingdom. Above the dzong is the 17<sup>th</sup> century watchtower or Ta Dzong. This unusual, circular building houses Bhutan's National Museum and has recently been fully restored. The museum has a fantastic collection of Bhutanese national treasures with displays including depictions of a wide range of Bhutan's history and culture and an impressive collection of ancient thangkas featuring Bhutan's important saints and teachers. You will also find some fearsome festival masks, a collection of religious statues, some early stone carvings and the original iron links from the nearby Tamchhog Bridge.

In the afternoon you will drive to Thimphu - a journey of around 1½-2 hours. Thimphu has an attractive valley location and is relatively small for a capital city although it has grown greatly in recent years. When you arrive in Thimphu you will drive up to see the large Buddha statue, perched above the town, this will give you excellent views and is a good way to orientate yourself to Thimphu and its surrounds.

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

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## Day 5: In and around Thimphu - sightseeing and visit Wangditse Monastery.

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This morning 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 1.5 hours. You will have time to visit the gompa before you walk down for another 30 minutes to reach Dechen Phodrang Monastery. This monastery houses around 450 student monks

enrolled in an 8 year course. The monastery is also home to some fantastic UNESCO monitored 12th century paintings. You will then meet your vehicle and be driven back to Thimphu.

In the afternoon there will be time to enjoy some sightseeing. There are many places of interest to visit in Thimphu, including 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 handicraft. It is interesting to visit the handmade paper workshop to see the paper being made and there are some nice items made from handmade paper for sale there. You could also visit the Post Office to buy some of Bhutan's very attractive stamps, they will even print a valid stamp with your face on it while you wait! They also have good t-shirts on sale.

While in Thimphu you might also like to visit the 'zoo'. This is in fact a very large enclosure (several acres) just above the town, containing only Takin, the very rare animal found exclusively in Bhutan and parts of China and possibly one of the most quirky and strangest looking animals you will ever see.

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

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#### **Day 6: Drive over the Dochu La to Punakha. Visit Chimi Lhakhang. Afternoon walk in the Punakha Valley.**

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After breakfast you will drive east to Punakha. Leaving Thimphu you climb to cross the Dochu La Pass, 3,048m/10,000ft, a spot marked by 108 chortens. Here, weather permitting you may take in a magnificent mountain vista. On clear days there are fabulous views of the eastern Himalaya from here but this is a beautiful spot even on misty days.

You descend from the pass into the lush Punakha valley. Before driving on to Punakha you visit Chimi Lhakhang a temple built by Drukpa Kunley. Known as the '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 - the phallus symbols painted on the outside walls of houses date back to his teachings. Chimi Lhakhang is especially popular with women who come here to pray for children. The temple is characterised by its many phallic symbols. The lakhang is reached by a short walk across the paddy fields and this short excursion takes about 45 minutes each way.

After lunch you will do a lovely walk in the Punakha Valley. You drive up the valley and start your walk at a pedestrian suspension bridge that crosses the Mo Chu River and follow up through paddy fields to the base of the hill where Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten is sited. The climb to the top is then quite steep but takes only 45 minutes or so. This Chorten was consecrated in December 1999 and contains sacred relics donated from Punakha Dzong. Leaving the grounds of the chorten via a different gate you descend to join a contouring path which ultimately leads you to the small village of Yabesa and you then follow the Mo Chu downstream past Sonagasha, the King's Palace and on to Punakha Dzong.

The fabulous Punakha Dzong, one of the most spectacular and important in the kingdom, is 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.

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

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#### **Day 7: Punakha Valley walk. Visit Punakha Dzong. Drive to Gangtey.**

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Today you will do a lovely walk in the Punakha Valley. You drive further up the valley and start your walk at a pedestrian suspension bridge that crosses the Mo Chu River and follow up through paddy fields to the base of the hill where Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten is sited. The climb to the top is then quite steep but takes only 45 minutes or so. This Chorten was consecrated in December 1999 and contains sacred relics donated from Punakha Dzong. Leaving the grounds of the chorten via a different gate you descend to join a contouring path which ultimately leads you to the small village of Yabesa and you then follow the Mo Chu downstream past Sonagasha, the King's Palace and on to Punakha Dzong.



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After lunch you drive down the valley to Whangdi Phodrang, whose dzong tragically burnt down in 2012. You then drive up the valley of the Dang Chu river and turn off to arrive at the Gangtey valley.

Gangtey (or Phobjikha as this area is also called) is a beautiful wide, unspoilt, glacial valley and is particularly famous as a major wintering ground for Black Necked Cranes, which arrive here late October and stay until early spring before heading back to their breeding grounds in Siberia. These birds are particularly respected in local culture and feature in local tradition as 'heavenly birds'.

**Overnight: Hotel Gakiling or Yo Lo Koe Lodge or Similar, Gangtey (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 8: Visit the Black-necked Crane Information Centre and attend the Black-necked crane Festival. Drive to Trongsa.**

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Today you may see the Black Necked Cranes which should be in residence for your visit. It can be worthwhile arranging to go to see them before breakfast as they awake and before they fly off to their feeding grounds for the day. Speak to your guide about this. After seeing the cranes you will drive up to visit the Information Centre where you will find much interesting background information about the cranes.



Next you will attend the Black-necked Crane Festival which takes place every year in Phobjikha. Initiated by the Bhutan Royal Society for Protection of Nature, the festival is now organised by the local community and celebrates the annual arrival of the cranes. The festival has a full day's programme of traditional masked dances and plays, including the 'crane dance'. Whilst it is not one of the more traditional Tsechus, being of recent origin and more community based, the festival has the advantage of receiving relatively few western visitors and offers a real insight into the Bhutanese 'at play'. The festival takes place in the monastery courtyard and there are local food and handicraft stalls. A traditional archery competition is usually held nearby.

After lunch you will leave Gangtey and drive out to the main road and up to cross the Pele La Pass at 3,300m/10,827ft. You might like to stop to admire the views from here. You then descend from the pass and drive down, passing the large chorten at Chendebji and on to Trongsa. You will see Trongsa's splendid Dzong long before you reach it because the road takes you up a long side valley before eventually turning back to Trongsa town. Trongsa has an exceptionally dramatic dzong, the ancestral home of the royal family. Because of its important strategic location this was one of the most important dzongs in the country. Set above the dzong is the Ta Dzong, the watchtower, a lovely old building which has been recently really beautifully renovated and houses an excellent museum with several floors of royal memorabilia and sacred artefacts. The views from the roof are worth the climb.

**Overnight: Yangkhil Resort or Similar, Trongsa (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 9: Drive to Chumey and up to Tharpaling. Ridge walk 3-4 hours. Drive to Jakar, 2,580m/8,465ft.**

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From Trongsa you drive across the Yotong La and towards Bumthang. The Bumthang region encompasses four major valleys and Jakar town where you will stay is in the main valley called Chokhor. The other valleys are the Ura Valley which is to the east, Tang Valley which is slightly more off the beaten track and the Chumey Valley. Arriving in Chumey your first port of call is the Nyimalung Monastery. Founded in 1938, the monastery is home to over 100 musically talented monks. From here you can walk down in 10 minutes to visit Prakhar Monastery a quaint village temple. Then rejoining your vehicle you will visit Zugney, a famous centre for weaving, where you will see the industry that is an integral part of Bhutanese society. It's said that every Bhutanese home is equipped with a loom for weaving and young girls are proficient in the craft before they reach the age of twenty.

You then drive up to the cluster of temples at Tharpaling - a sacred spot and place of meditation, founded by Geluwa Lonchen Rabchampa (1308-1363) during his self-exile from Tibet for ten years. Several picturesque monasteries dot the hillside above the Chumey Valley with views over Domkhar (Chumey) and Domkhar Summer Palace. After a picnic lunch, you start the 4 hour walk along an old trail back towards Chumey. The path starts out beneath craggy cliffs, from where it climbs fairly gently up to the ridge top and reaches the Shutre Sae Pass at 3,700m/12,139ft. Sited on the pass in a glass case is a statue of the founder of Tharpaling. From here the views are phenomenal - looking south you can see over the Chumey/Domkhar Valley with the Black Mountains in the distance. The other way you get fabulous and unexpected views over Jakar town with the airport runway and the dzong clearly seen far below. Beyond and further north, you can see towards the high mountains - perhaps even Mount Gangkar Punsum on a clear day.

You descend from the pass in beautiful forest, nearly all downhill. On the higher reaches, you pass through pine, fir and rhododendron forest. Eventually you reach the road again at a huge area of prayer flags where you will meet your transport and head to your hotel in Jakar.

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

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**Day 10: Morning walk to Swan Lakhang - 3 hours. Afternoon valley walk to various temples - 2-3 hours.**

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In the morning you will visit Ngang Lakhang, known as Swan Lakhang, or Swan Temple. First you drive the short distance to arrive at a long mani wall in Tangbi. You descend to cross the river by a suspension bridge and then have a pleasant walk of about 3 hours, up the river valley through forest and meadows to reach Swan Lakhang. This temple has an illustrious history. Guru Rimpoche is said to have visited here and the present temple, built in the 15th century, is said to be named after swans supposedly seen on a nearby lake by the temple's founder, a Tibetan lama named Namkha Samdrup. After your visit to the temple you descend to cross the river to a road and will meet your vehicle to drive back to Jakar for lunch.



In the afternoon you will explore round Jakar with an almost entirely level walk taking in some of the principal sights of the valley. The ancient Jambay Lhakhang temple is considered a particularly important temple by the Bhutanese, It is one of the country's oldest temples, being built in the mid-7th century. One interesting feature to look for is the set of three steps in the main temple. The first step, now hidden below floor level, is said to represent the time of the past or 'historical' Buddha. The second, very well worn, step represents the present Buddha, whilst the third step above, is said to represent the age of the future Buddha. The point at which the second step is worn down to ground level is held to be the time when the world as we currently know it will end. From Jambay you take a farm track along the valley floor and walk for 30 minutes to reach Kurjey Lakhang, a series of three large temples. The oldest of the temples here houses a rock indented with the body shape of Guru Rinpoche, whilst the most recent dates back just 25 years and was built by the Queen Mother - Ashi Kesang Wangchuck. Descending from the temples you cross a suspension bridge and walk downstream for 45 minutes to Tamshing Lakhang, the most important Nyingma gumpa in the Kingdom, established in 1501 by Pemalingpa. Inside you can see a suit of chain-mail armour, which Buddhists believe will bring good fortune if worn and then walked around the inner temple three times. Your transport will meet you outside the gumpa and return you to your hotel, with perhaps a brief stop in Jakhar town-ship on the way.

Later you can visit the picturesque Jakar Dzong, the 'Castle of the White Bird', so called because a white bird was supposed to have indicated the most auspicious place to build. Your guide will suggest the best way to fit it into your walks.

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

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**Day 11: Fly to Paro. Drive over Cheli La pass, 3,990m/13,090ft, to Haa Valley with visit to Kila Nunnery on way.**

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Today you fly to Paro. (if your flight is delayed or cancelled you will drive back to Paro over two days). Arriving in Paro, you will drive in about 1½ hours up to the Cheli La, a pass at 3,990m/13,090ft where in clear weather you will have wonderful views of the snow-capped mountains to the west which mark the border with Tibet. On the way you will call in at Kila Nunnery, a peaceful retreat for some 30 nuns who live a life of seclusion in an incredibly pretty spot set in lush forest beneath cliffs.



From the pass you descend on a long zig-zag road down into the Haa Valley. As you approach you will notice three almost identical conical hills in a line on the other side of the valley. These are believed by the locals to be the physical manifestations of three very important Buddhist saints. The left one is Manjushri (the god who holds the flaming sword which cuts the knot of ignorance), the middle one is Chenrizig (the Buddha of compassion of which the Dalai Lama is the human incarnation) and the right hand hill is Chana Dorji (this being the protector god of Bhutan). Collectively they are known as Rigsum (three hills). As you descend further you look down on the square yellow roof of Haa's monastery-fortress, the Namgay Dzong. Spread around the dzong are the buildings of the Indian Army dating from the visit of President Nehru - the Indian army has a presence in Bhutan ostensibly to protect the kingdom from possible invasion from China. Although part of the dzong is used by the Indian Army the central tower of the Dzong is still used by the local people. The old town itself is just to the north-west and is really quite attractive with traditional two storey shops and a post office. There is a large school in Haa. In the afternoon you should have time for some initial exploration in the Haa Valley.

**Overnight: Lechuna Heritage Lodge or Similar, Haa (Meals: BLD)**

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#### **Day 12: Walks in the Haa Valley. Drive back to Paro with visit to Dzong Drakha.**

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In the morning you will have time for a walk in the Haa Valley. Firstly you might drive up to the very top of the valley for an overview. This is a very pretty drive taking about 40 minutes and from here you will get really good views of the valley as well as over to the mountains of the west. On your return you take a spur road to Talung village and walk down from the top of the village for a look at a typical Haa village. Rejoining your vehicle at the bottom of the village you then drive the short distance to the bottom of a track for a nice walk up to Yongto Gumpa, an ascent of 100 metres taking about 30 minutes. Yongto Gumpa is perched on a ridge overlooking the main valley and is one of the oldest monasteries in Haa, thought to have been built in the 15th century. From here you walk downhill for 30 minutes through pine trees to Yangtha village. This is a large village on the floor of the main valley. In 2001 they suffered a huge fire which destroyed 12 houses. Amazingly, the fire left the temple of the village perfectly intact. After the fire the King visited the people of the village and paid for the reconstruction. The new houses are built in exactly the same traditional style and blend in remarkably well.

After lunch you drive back to Paro with a visit on the way to the temple of Dzong Drakha, a beautiful cliff temple spectacularly located on a broad ledge with vertical limestone cliffs above and below and with lovely views.

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

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#### **Day 13: Walk to Taktsang Monastery.**

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A short drive beyond Paro town takes you to the trail head for the walk up to the famous Tiger's Nest, Taktsang Monastery. The monastery is perched some 600m/2,000ft up on a cliff overlooking the valley and was said to be where the legendary Indian saint, Guru Padma Sambhava, flew from Tibet on the back of a tiger to defeat five demons, who were opposing the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan. It's a steep uphill walk through woods, of about 1½-2hrs, to reach a tea house (an ascent of 340m/1,115ft.) Apart from offering welcome refreshment this 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 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.



Once you have walked back down you will have lunch and then the rest of the day can either be used to do any further sightseeing your guide suggests, or to do a little last minute shopping before you leave Bhutan.

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

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**Day 14: Fly to Kathmandu. Transfer to hotel.**

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Again a sensational take-off and scenic Himalayan flight past Chomolhari, Bhutan's second highest peak, past Kangchenjunga and Everest back to Kathmandu, where you transfer to your hotel.

**Overnight: Dwarika's Hotel, Kathmandu (Meals: B)**

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**Day 15: At leisure in Kathmandu. Transfer to the airport and depart for London.**

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You will have much of the day free in Kathmandu when you may wish to do some sightseeing or shopping or simply relax by the pool at your hotel. Later there will be a group transfer to the airport for your overnight flight back to London.

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

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**Day 16: Arrive London.**

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## Our grading system

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Gentle Walking Bhutan is graded as a Gentle walking holiday, as described below.

**Gentle**

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

These holidays are suitable for people who enjoy easy-paced walks in the British countryside or exploring on foot rather than in a vehicle.

## Trip altitude

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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

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

### What's included:

- ✓ An English speaking Bhutanese leader
- ✓ 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 internal flights and hotel/airport transfers
- ✓ Dwarika's 5\* hotel in Kathmandu, bed & breakfast on twin-share basis
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ In Bhutan, good standard hotel accommodation in main towns and best available hotels in outlying towns, on full board, twin-share basis.
- ✓ Bhutan Visa
- ✓ Bhutan Departure Tax
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle

### Airport transfers

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

### What's not included:

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

### Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

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

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 this itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is unavailable 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:



#### **Dwarika's Hotel, Kathmandu**

Dwarika's unique 5\* hotel is built in Nepalese style and features many architectural relics rescued from palaces and temples in the valley as well as Nepalese furniture, carvings and statues. The building has a palace-like atmosphere and you really feel as if you are stepping back into Nepal's history. Rooms are large and stylish and its elegant restaurant is one of the places to eat in Kathmandu. It also has a pleasant courtyard garden with swimming pool.



#### **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 new 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.



#### **Zhingkhram Resort or Similar, Punakha**

Overlooking Punakha Dzong, and only opened in 2016, the Zhingkhram Resort is one of the best 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.



#### **Hotel Gakiling or Yo Lo Koe Lodge or Similar, Gangtey**

These two lodges in Gangtey have been recently updated. They offer relatively simple but comfortable accommodation, and are built in local style with cosy rooms using a lot of wood panelling and with attached bathrooms. Food is plentiful and good.



#### **Yangkhil Resort or Similar, Trongsa**

Yangkhil Resort. This is the best hotel in Trongsa, perched outside the town with views across to the dzong and valley. During busy periods you may stay at the simpler but attractive Punzhi Hotel.





#### **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.



#### **Lechuna Heritage Lodge or Similar, Haa**

This lovely heritage lodge located in the picturesque village of Lechu, not far from Haa Village, is a renovated farmhouse. It has been beautifully restored, skillfully blending modern comforts with traditional style. The lodge has a cosy bar, common room and garden courtyard, and although its seven lovely rooms share bathrooms, they have been individually designed and offer very comfortable accommodation.

## **Meal arrangements**

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Bed and Breakfast in Kathmandu and full board elsewhere.

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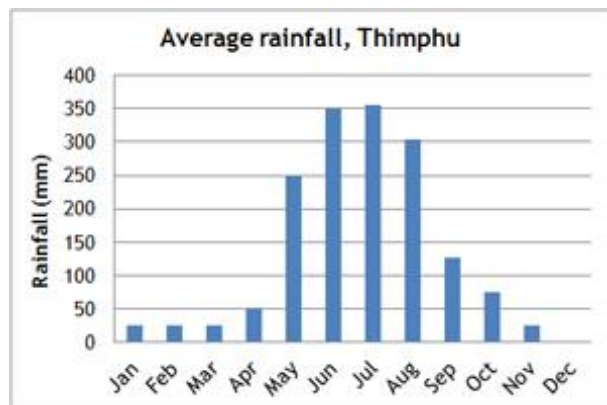
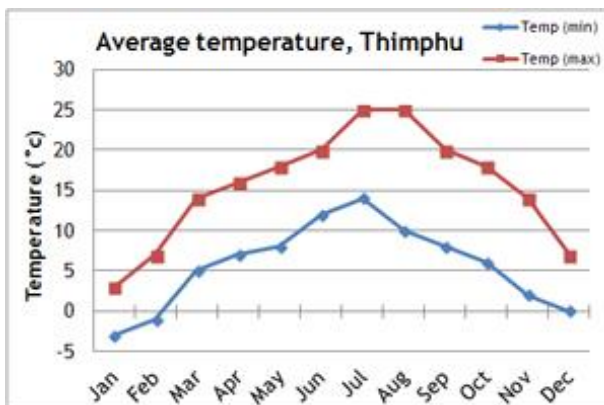
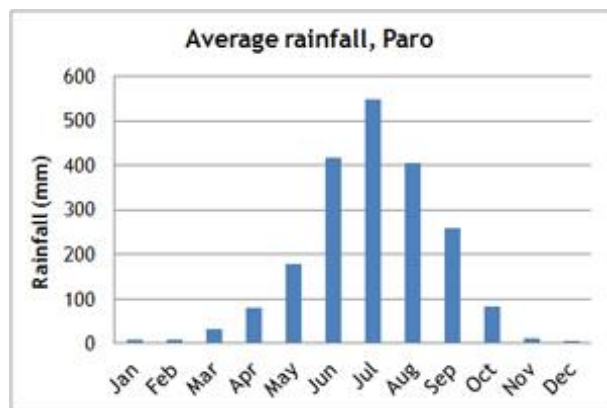
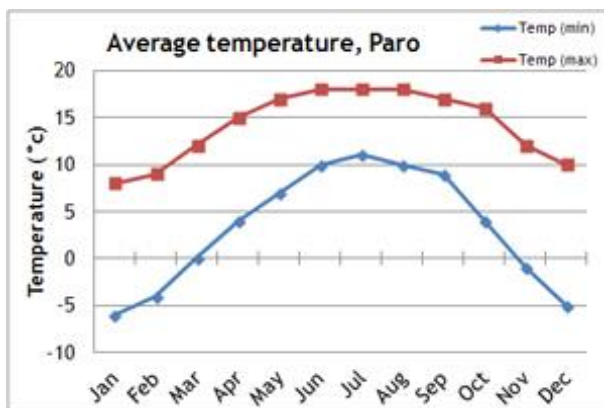
When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

## **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. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).



#### Hotel upgrades and extra nights in Bhutan

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

#### Additional accommodation in Nepal

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



#### Kathmandu Valley sightseeing excursions

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



#### Wildlife extensions in Nepal - Chitwan, Bardia & Koshi Tappu

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



#### Royal Manas National Park, Bhutan

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



#### Bumdra Trek, Bhutan

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 well-paced holiday offers an excellent balance between sightseeing, walking and travel as well as time to relax and explore at leisure.
- Our itinerary offers an excellent and varied programme of walks and stays in comfortable hotels in Bhutan.
- We include time at a colourful festival - a highlight of any holiday in Bhutan.
- Your tour will be led by professional, English-speaking guides who will be delighted to share their expert knowledge of the history, culture and nature of their home country.
- While in Kathmandu you will stay at award winning Dwarika's Hotel, one of the best hotels in Kathmandu and a unique heritage property.
- 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.
- 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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*We waited two years (due to covid!) for this trip to happen. Was it worth the wait? Definitely! Bhutan is a wonderful, beautiful experience, unlike anywhere else in the world I have been. The trip was well organised even given the last minute changes to the itinerary, the guide was very professional as was our driver but most of all, the Bhutanese people were so friendly and welcoming. Being offered tea with the locals on the Tiger's Nest trek was perhaps the highlight of the trip!*

*-Peter Ball*



*We thoroughly enjoyed our recent holiday to Bhutan. It is a beautiful Country with stunning scenery and lovely people. The standard of hotels and the food were better than we had expected and our guide and support team couldn't have done more to make our trip more enjoyable. The information and support we received from Mountain Kingdoms, both before and during our trip was impressive and our small group of 12 gelled well during our two weeks together. November was also a very good time to visit Bhutan, the weather being superb during our stay, with lovely blue skies and clear visibility.*

*-Mr & Mrs C, Hampshire*



*Personally the trip exceeded expectations in terms of accommodation, comfort, food etc and every day was just excellent. Bhutan has been a dream for a long time, and I was just in awe of the scenery, the wonderful people and all the special experiences.*

*-Mrs P, Devon*

*This trip was well structured to provide a very interesting look at a beautiful country. The balance of culture, hiking and being in nature, culminating in the Paro festival and ascending the Tiger's Nest monastery worked well. The walks were challenging but provided the perfect build up to Tiger's Nest.*

*Mrs P H, London*



*A fantastic and memorable experience which exceeded all my expectations, superbly organised with excellent guides and drivers. A holiday of a lifetime, thank you all so very much.*

*-Mr R G, Shropshire*



*Absolutely perfect introduction to Bhutan with a mix of walks, guided tours of temples and dzongs, and a festival. Hotels were of high standard of comfort. Guide was knowledgeable, personable and really made the trip. Even the driving was a fascinating experience.*

*-Mr R A, Dorset*

*Bhutan is a magical experience - it surpassed our expectations. Excellent organisation. Superb attention to detail. This is the third time I have travelled with Mountain Kingdoms and every time the trips have been excellent. Mountain Kingdoms are our first choice of company for this type of trip.*

*-Mr & Mrs S, West Sussex*

# 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 CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



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

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

### **Carbon Offsetting**

#### **Already doing:**

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

#### **Will do:**

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

### **Reducing Carbon Emissions**

#### **Already doing:**

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

#### **Will do:**

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

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



