

Cultural Cycling Tour of Bhutan with Black-necked Crane Festival

A fascinating cultural tour of Bhutan on two wheels and a visit to one of Bhutan's colourful festivals



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Cycling Tour
Accommodation	Hotels
Grade	Moderate
Duration	18 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	Cycling on: 10 days. Walks on: 2 days
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Cycling Leader Bhutan
Land only	Joining in Kathmandu, Nepal
Max altitude	3,990m/13,090ft, Cheli La, Day 14

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



Watch related videos online: [Cultural Cycling Tour of Bhutan](#)

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Departures

Group departures

2021 Dates:

Tue 23 Mar - Fri 09 Apr With Paro Tsechu
Tue 02 Nov - Fri 19 Nov With Black-necked Crane Festival

2022 Dates:

Sun 10 Apr - Wed 27 Apr With Paro Tsechu
Wed 02 Nov - Sat 19 Nov With Black-necked Crane Festival

This detailed itinerary is for our autumn departures only. A separate itinerary for our spring departures can be downloaded from our website or requested from the Mountain Kingdoms office.

Group prices and optional supplements

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

No Surcharge Guarantee

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

Will the trip run?

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

Insurance

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

Private Departures

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

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday.

If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

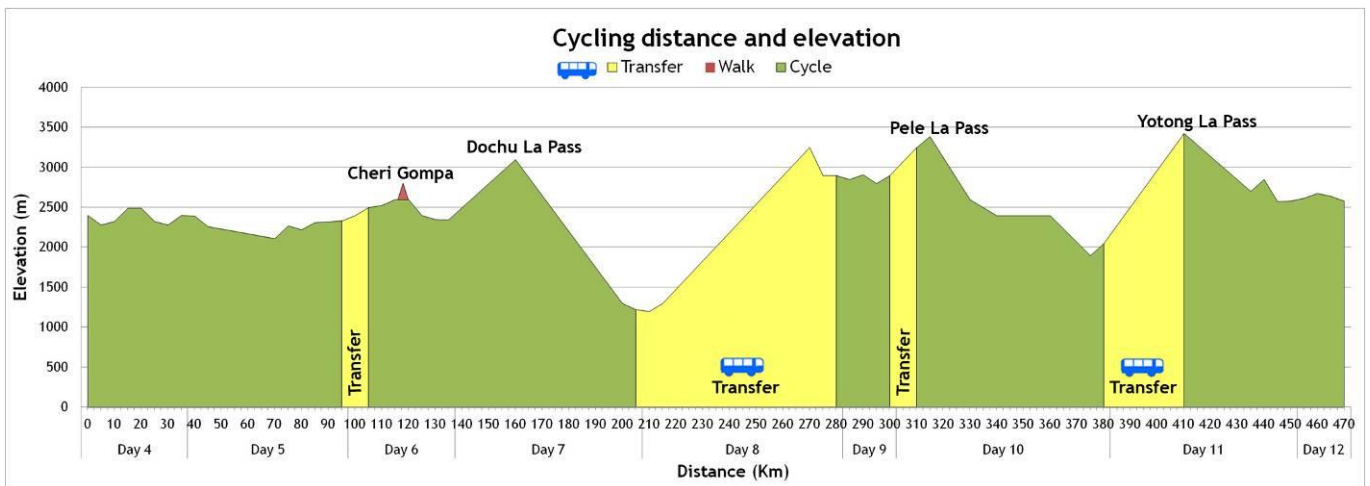
Your guide



Mountain Kingdoms have been working with the same partner in Bhutan since 1986. Their guides are some of the best in the Kingdom. They speak fluent English, as this is taught in all Bhutanese schools, and are fully qualified guides. The Tourism Authority of Bhutan insists that a Bhutanese tour leader must pass his/her guiding exams in Thimphu before accompanying groups of foreign visitors.

Phub Tshering 'PT'

PT is our main cycling guide in Bhutan, his knowledge of flora and fauna is second to none. PT lives in Thimphu with his wife and child and has been guiding for over 13 years so he has great experience and you'll be hard pressed to find a fact he doesn't know.



Distances measured on a GPS

Your trip highlights

- Enjoy a moderate graded cycling holiday, without too many big climbs and with bike hire included
- Freewheel for hours downhill past virgin forests and ancient monuments
- Spend two nights in a farmhouse homestay to experience traditional village life
- Visit dzongs and the famous Tiger's Nest Monastery in Bhutan, and take a guided tour of Kathmandu's key cultural sights
- Join the celebrations at the Black-necked Crane Festival in the Gangtey Valley

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-3	Fly to Kathmandu. Fly to Paro.
Days 4-5	Cycling in Paro valley and on to Thimphu
Days 6-7	Cycling and sightseeing in Thimphu and ride over to Punakha via the Dochu La.
Days 8-9	Visit Punakha Dzong. Cycle/drive to Gangtey. Loop ride in Gangtey Valley.
Days 10-11	Attend the Black-Necked Crane Festival. Cycle down from Pele La to Trongsa. Cycle to Bumthang.
Days 12-13	Cycle to local monasteries and Dzongs around Bumthang. Fly back to Paro.
Day 14	Drive to Cheli La Pass. Walk to Kila Gompa. Time at leisure.
Day 15	Walk up to Taktsang Monastery.
Days 16-18	Fly to Kathmandu. Sightseeing tour. Fly to London.

Trip summary

Before the early 1960s the only means of travel within Bhutan was on foot or horseback. Since then a road has been built that connects west with east, and in recent years cycling has become more and more popular. Even the Royal family are keen cyclists and it's not unusual to find the fourth king riding his bike around the hills of Thimphu. In fact, there's no better way to discover Bhutan than on two wheels.

On this thrilling cycling holiday you'll travel from Paro all the way across to the more remote region of Bumthang. Cycling with the backdrop of the high peaks of the eastern Himalaya you will ride through virgin forests and remote valleys and along airy ridges with superb views. En route, you'll explore villages, hill top dzongs and ancient monasteries and stay in the townships of Thimphu, Punakha, Gangtey and Jakar all of which have a unique charm and fascinating cultural attractions. In Gangtey you'll stay for two nights in a traditional farmhouse homestay for a real insight into authentic village life. You'll even spend time at a Bhutanese festival - one of the real highlights of any visit to the country. There are challenging passes to 'have a go at' and some exhilarating downhills to enjoy. But no need to worry if you'd rather take the less taxing route to the top of the pass as a support vehicle accompanies you from start to finish.

Returning to Paro by plane, you'll end your time in Bhutan on a high with a walk up to majestic Taktsang Monastery and a farewell dinner to celebrate your fine achievement.

This exciting trip combines excellent cycling with the opportunity to experience the culture, people and places that make the Thunder Dragon Kingdom so special, with the added bonus of all the sights and sounds that travelling by bike allows.

Note from our MD, Steve Berry

In October 2018 I cycled much, but not all of, this completely brilliant itinerary! I simply cannot tell you what a thrill it is to cycle 40+ km down from a high pass in Bhutan. What a fantastic way to see Bhutan! The great thing is that the support vehicle/s are all the time coming up behind and if you do not relish tackling the monster climbs of some of the passes it is easy to do as much as you feel like, and climb aboard the vehicle as and when you have had enough. There are normally at least two vehicles which also allows a lot of flexibility. The fresh air and freedom is a marvelous tonic. The scenery is staggering and the people you pass wave and shout encouragement. Just imagine that once a year the now famous 'Tour of the Dragon' cycle race completes Jakar to Thimphu in 24 hours (very few actually complete the race it has to be said). Inconcievable!! The point of our cycle tour is to enjoy the ride, not wreck yourself in the process. We have very deliberately designed this trip to be within the reach of average cyclists, and at the same time showcase Bhutan's unique culture, traditons, way of life, and dramatic scenery. Highly recommended!!

Special notes

Is this the right trip for me?

Who is it for?

This trip is designed for the casual cyclist who wants to experience the sights and sounds of Bhutan. As there is always a support vehicle behind you there are no concerns over whether you can make it or not, if you feel like a rest, then just jump into the van. The majority of the cycling is on quiet roads, this ride is open to all abilities.

What it entails:

9 days of cycling with rest days in between. The longest day involves a climb up to the top of the Dochu La at a height of 3,140m/10,302ft. The climb itself gains 800m/2,625ft over a gentle climb with a gradient of around 4%. This climb will take over 3 hours but there is no hurry and you are free to stop and admire the views whenever you feel like. There is of course the support vehicle travelling behind you that will be on hand to offer a lift.

Vehicle Support

Throughout the trip there will be a support vehicle following behind you, this will act as your back up and is available for you whenever you feel like getting a lift to the top or bottom of a hill.

Bikes

Bike hire is included in the cost of your holiday and the bikes supplied in Bhutan are all well maintained, lightweight aluminium framed Trek Mountain bikes with front suspension designed to smooth out the ride. The actual model can vary but they are generally in the Trek 3000 series.

However, as you will know your own bike the best you may prefer to take it with you. If you do this you should be aware of a few points. If you choose to take your own bicycle then you will need to make sure that it has had a thorough service before the trip and is in good working order. Semi slick tyres are a good choice for this trip.

You will need to cover any excess baggage charges payable to the airline if your bike and luggage takes you over the allowable limit. Our Flights Manager will be happy to provide information on luggage allowances and additional costs.

Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Depart London.

Depart London on your overnight flight to Kathmandu.

Overnight: In flight

Day 2: Arrive Kathmandu. Transfer to hotel.

You will be met on arrival at Kathmandu airport and there will be a group transfer to your hotel. You might like to venture out to Thamel for your evening meal, or eat in the hotel restaurant if you are tired from your journey.

Overnight: Shangri La Hotel, Kathmandu

Day 3: Fly to Paro in Bhutan. Allocation of bikes and warm up ride.

Transfer for the flight to Paro in Bhutan. 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 for the best views. You will be met on arrival by your Bhutanese guide and then transferred to your hotel. If you have brought your own bike then this is a good time to assemble it, if renting a bike it will be adjusted to fit you. Depending on flight schedules, there might be time for a warm up ride for you to get acquainted with your steed.



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

Day 4: Cycle along Paro Valley to Drugyel Dzong and back to Paro - 32km, 3 hours.

Today's ride is designed to get you used to your bike and the roads of Bhutan, luckily the Bhutanese drive on the left hand side of the road so there shouldn't be any issues there! You will start the day by freewheeling down the hill from your hotel, with beautiful views across the lush paddy fields to the impressive Paro Dzong. From the bottom of the valley you will head through the quaint town of Paro, with its traditional Bhutanese architecture and archery fields. It is a gentle incline that will lead you up to the junction where the road splits for Taktsang or Drugyel Dzong. Today you will be visiting Drugyel Dzong but the dramatic view of Taktsang from here will whet your appetite for your later visit.

The road gets a little bit steeper here as you make your way up the valley but it shouldn't prove to be too much of a challenge as long as you take your time and get used to the fact that the air is a bit thinner up there. The dzong itself is a fascinating building with a rich history. Until recently the building was a complete ruin after a fire destroyed it in 1951, but it has now been largely restored. This is the point where a lot of our treks start from, including our epic Lunana Snowman trek. When you finish exploring you will have a picnic lunch and cycle back down the valley to Paro, stopping en route to visit the interesting Druk Home Museum.

Cycling ascent and descent - Ascent: 250m Descent: 250m

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

Day 5: Cycle to Thimphu, 2,320m/7,611ft - 50km, 3-4 hours. Visit Thimphu Dzong.

This morning you will cycle down into Paro and across the traditional wooden covered bridge and to the foot of Paro Dzong (Rinchen Pung Dzong). You will be visiting inside this incredible building on your return to Paro but for now your guide will give you a brief history of one of Bhutan's finest examples of architecture. From here you will follow the river along the valley floor on quiet dirt roads before a short climb takes you up to join the smooth tarmac that will take you down to the junction at Chuzom where the road forks between the roads to the Ha valley, the border with India at Phuntsholing and also your road to the capital of Bhutan, Thimphu.



From here the road undulates as it makes its way up to the big gates that mark the start of Thimphu. All the way along the road there are fantastic views of the lush green valleys stretching away on your left hand side. As you enter Thimphu you will notice that there are new buildings appearing on the outskirts of the town, it's interesting to note that even the new buildings follow the traditional styles of architecture. Lunch will be taken in a restaurant in Thimphu. After lunch you will cycle to your hotel to freshen up and then you will visit the beautiful Thimphu Dzong. This is a perfect time to visit as the soft light of the late afternoon casts long shadows across the Dochey (central courtyard) as the monks can be heard chanting inside the Utse (central tower).

Cycling ascent and descent - Ascent: 550m Descent: 611m

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

Day 6: Circuit ride with stop at Guru Lhakhang - approximately 3 hours.

This morning there will be a short transfer of around 30 mins up to the start point of today's ride, this means that you will miss out on some of the climbing for today but will still get to freewheel down to town at the end of the ride. There is also the option to cycle this section if you would like.

As you begin cycling the road undulates and before long you will reach a large image of Guru Rinpoche that has been carved into the rock face. Just round the corner from here there is a great view up towards the high mountains of the Himalaya. Continuing for a few more minutes you will arrive at Guru Lhakhang - a small temple built in 1959 by Tibetan refugees - which you will stop to explore. Riding on, the next sight you see is Cheri Gompa, perched on the hillside straight in front of you and with Tango Gompa to the right, also precariously placed. Cheri Gompa, the oldest in Bhutan, is now closed for refurbishment so sadly you won't be able to enter. However, if you cross the old cantilever bridge you will find a grassy area, with a large prayer wheel and chorten which makes an ideal lunch spot.

After you have enjoyed your picnic lunch, it's time to hop back on your bikes as you head off on your return journey to Thimphu. The riding in the afternoon starts off on a beautiful quiet forest dirt road that passes through the remote villages of this area, don't be put off by the short sharp climb at the start, it's a lot easier after this! You will eventually rejoin where you were dropped off this morning and all that remains is to follow the winding road down to Thimphu to complete what has surely been a fantastic day.

Cycling elevation and descent - Ascent: 421m Descent: 595m

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

Day 7: Cycle to Punakha via the Dochu La, 3,140m/10,302ft - 72km, 6 hours.

Today is the big challenge of the holiday, the Dochu La at 3,140m/10,302ft. There is no getting around the fact that this is a big climb at over 800m higher than where you start from, but the good news is that the gradient is a steady 4% all the way up the 21km climb and at no point does it become too steep to cycle. However, if at any time you find the climb too tough, the back-up vehicle can always give you a lift!

The scenery is the most breathtaking part of this climb. On your right hand side you will have excellent views back down to Thimphu, and all around you is the lush green forest which only gets better and better as you enter a national botanical park, roughly half way. When you start to see the prayer flags fluttering in the wind ahead, you know you are nearly there and the sense of accomplishment is huge. There is time to take a well-

deserved break and enjoy the fantastic vista, on a clear day panoramic views can be had of the eastern Himalaya, including Bhutan's highest mountain, Gangkar Punsum, 7,550m/24,770ft. From here there is only one direction to go, down! You will make your way to a nice restaurant about ten minutes ride away where you will enjoy a buffet lunch and more great views of the mountains in the distance.

After you have refuelled and impressed your fellow diners with stories of your ascent it's time to start your 45km descent. From the top you get an idea of just how far you have to go down. It takes around 2-3 hours to make your way to the bottom, which when you consider you don't need to pedal the whole way it really is incredible. If you hadn't already realised you were in the high country, you will by the end. As you head down through the varied forest on the windy road, with the trees clinging to the hillside, you will have to choose your spots to stop and enjoy the views carefully as if you stopped every time you saw great views, you would still be cycling the next morning. As you finally approach the bottom of the descent and Punakha you will notice that the temperature has risen quite a lot and the wind has picked up especially as you cycle past Wangdue Phodrang (or Windy Phodrang as the locals call it).

Upon reaching the valley floor it's a short ride up to visit Drukpa Kunley's temple. Built in the centre of the Punakha Valley and called Chimi Lhakhang, this temple was built by the "Divine Madman" to celebrate his victory over the demoness of the Dochu La. It is famed for the many phallic symbols that can be found here and as you should be visiting late in the afternoon there is a good chance that the young monks will be relaxing by playing football in the grounds. They also enjoy cycling on your bikes if you're willing to pedal your bike up the short climb to the temple.

The 'Divine Madman' - Drukpa Kunley (1455-1520)

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

Cycling ascent and descent - Ascent: 989m Descent: 2,100m

Overnight: Zhingkhams Resort Or Damchen Resort Or Similar, Punakha (Meals: BLD)

Day 8: Visit Punakha Dzong. Drive/cycle to Gangtey, 2,900m/9,514ft - 83km, 3 hours. Visit Gangtey Dzong.

There will be time this morning for a visit to Punakha Dzong. This really is an incredible structure. Standing outside the main entrance you are struck by the sheer scale of the building. The inside is even more impressive.



After your visit to the dzong you will cycle down the valley to Wangdiphodrang (23km), taking the less busy road on the left hand side of the river, and then continue just a short distance up the valley towards the Pele La. To ride all the way would really be a very challenging proposition as the distance is 70km, all steeply uphill, so instead, at the Kyichu Lodge you will climb aboard the back-up vehicle to drive up to the Pele La and from there it is mostly downhill cycling to reach Gangtey. The views on the way up are fantastic but then you will have begun to expect nothing less by now.

Reaching the Pele La at 3423m/11,230ft you will enjoy the views before taking to your bikes again to ride back down, turning off towards Gangtey. At the top of the valley is the impressive Gangtey Gompa which with its commanding views over the valley is a 'must-see' location. As you make your way down towards the valley floor you will be struck by how wide open this valley is - it's quite unlike anywhere else in Bhutan. In the winter months this valley is home to the Black-necked cranes, they should have arrived in time for your visit.

After your visit to Gangtey Gompa you will be met by your vehicle to drive to your hotel.

Overnight: Farmhouse Homestay, Gangtey Valley (Meals: BLD)

Day 9: Loop ride around Gangtey - 20km, 2-3 hours. Visit Black-necked Crane centre.

After breakfast you make this morning's loop ride which takes you in a clockwise direction around the valley. With beautiful forests up high, potato fields down low, wild flowers growing everywhere and prayer flags all around, it's easy to see why this stunning valley is a favourite amongst Mountain Kingdoms' clients. As the morning light shimmers on the tranquil streams at the bottom of the valley you will set off on your morning's ride. On the first half of the loop you will be following a dirt road on the opposite side of the valley from your hotel, contouring along the side of the valley you will soon reach the picturesque Domchoe Lhakhang, which dates back to the 7th century. From here the valley opens up before you with views along to the small hamlets in the distance. The trail then heads down to the valley floor again, and works its way back towards the hotel, passing through remote villages and timber yards. Lunch will be taken in the hotel.

In the afternoon you will head to the interesting Black-necked Crane Visitor Centre for an insightful visit. This centre has many interesting exhibits as well as a couple of high powered Swarovski scopes to enable you to get a nice close up of these graceful birds. There is also an interesting hand woven carpet factory nearby that is worth a visit if time permits.

Cycling ascent and descent - Ascent: 370m Descent 370m

Overnight: Farmhouse Homestay, Gangtey Valley (Meals: BLD)

Day 10: Attend the Black-necked Crane Festival in the morning. Ride from Gangtey to Trongsa, 2,050m/6,726, 70km, 5-6 hours. Sightseeing as time permits.

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 breakfast 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 to buy from. A traditional archery competition is usually held nearby.



In the afternoon you will drive up to the top of the valley and unload your bikes at Gangtey Gomba. From here you will set off on today's bike ride as you make your way up to the top of the Pele La pass, 3,390m/11,122ft, this road is not too steep and is only a few kilometres long and before you know it you will be at the top taking pictures amongst the scattered prayer flags. The road then heads down the other side for another fantastic descent with more incredible scenery. Before you get too far there may be time for a break at a fantastically located café on the side of the road; with the views stretching away in front of you it's the perfect place to sit and relax. After your caffeine hit, it's time to get back on the bike and re-join the road as it weaves its way down the mountain for approximately 60km. The road is cut into the mountain in places and passes by several beautiful waterfalls, mani walls, gompas and roadside stalls. The wildlife spotters amongst you will also have a field day with abundant birdlife, yaks and monkeys along the way.

After around three hours of enjoying the downhill you will be met by a fantastic view of Trongsa Dzong, this viewpoint looks directly across at the Dzong and the town of Trongsa, it's a great spot for pictures as you can see just how close to the edge of the rocky outcrop this Dzong is. There is a short downhill section to the bottom of the valley floor and then a short climb up to the town.

Lunch will be taken in your hotel. In the afternoon there may be time to visit the fascinating museum which is inside the old watchtower that is perched high on the hillside overlooking the Dzong, this museum is well worth a visit and screens an interesting film that does a good job of summing up Bhutan's history and culture. The view from the top of the tower is incredible.

After this visit you will head down to the vast Dzong for a visit and then maybe a leisurely walk around town and back to the hotel for dinner.

Cycling ascent and descent - Ascent: 400m Descent: 1,750m

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

Day 11: Transfer to the Yutong La. Cycle down to Bumthang, 2,580m/8,464ft - 45km, 3-4 hours (additional 4 hours if cycling to the top of the Yotong La)..

This morning there are two options, for those of you who are feeling fit and fancy another challenge there is the climb to the top of the Yotong La, this is a 30km climb that will take around four hours. The road is a gradual climb and provides excellent views on the way up, it is quite similar to the Dochu La climb from earlier in the trip. This is the highest point of the trip at 3,425m/11,237ft. For those of you who prefer to take it a little easier there is the option of a later start and taking the van to the top from where there is another long sweeping descent down to the valley floor where you will have a picnic lunch.

The afternoon's ride follows the valley floor on one of the flattest sections of riding on the whole trip, but this will change as you approach the last high pass of the trip; the Kiki La. This climb is shorter than the other passes on this holiday and shouldn't prove to be too difficult, but as always there is the support van behind for those with tired legs, and you will stop for tea along the way. The final hairpin descent of today heads down the bottom of the valley and joins the rushing water of the Chakhar Chu River as it makes its way to Bumthang. The pleasant ride to the hotel passes by the town centre with its one main street heading away to your right.

Cycling ascent and descent: Ascent: 282m Descent: 1,110m

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

Day 12: Loop ride around the Bumthang Valley with stops at Ken Chu Sum Monastery and Kurjey Lhakhang - 20km, 2-3 hours.

Today's loop ride of the Bumthang valley is a fairly casual affair so there is time to have a nice relaxing breakfast before heading off on your bikes for the last time. The ride starts off with a gentle pedal through town passing traditional arts shops and cafes, before heading to Ken Chu Sum monastery, the main temple of this monastery is being rebuilt after it was ravaged by fire, it is fascinating to see the process of rebuilding and the amount of time and work that goes into each part of the temple. Across the road from the monastery is the timber yard where all the wood is being prepared - from the slicing into planks to the fine detail carving, all the work is done on site. It's a fascinating place to walk around and the carpenters are friendly and happy to talk about their work. Just up the road is Tamshing Lhakhang: 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.



The next stop is Kurjey Lhakhang, 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 to 1984 when it was built for the Queen Mother - Ashi Kesang Wangchuck. It is at this monastery where the cremation takes place on the death of the kings of Bhutan. The final stop of today's ride is Jambay Lhakhang. This is one of the country's oldest temples, 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. Lunch today will be a delicious picnic; its location will vary depending on the progress of today's ride.

The afternoon can be spent exploring the interesting town before returning to the hotel to relax.

Cycling ascent and descent - Ascent: 260m Descent: 260m

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

Day 13: Fly to Paro. Visit Paro Museum and Kyichu Lhakhang.

After breakfast you will be transferred to the small Bumthang airport, after undergoing the stringent security checks (quick glance at your bags) you will board the small plane and enjoy the stunning views of the Bumthang valley before you climb high for great views of the high mountains off in the distance. This is only a 25 minute flight but it's incredibly scenic. Upon arrival at Paro airport you will visit the Paro Museum which is situated high up over-looking the Dzong, this is an interesting museum with some great exhibits. From here you will head down to the Dzong to take a look inside this impressive building.

After lunch you will also visit the ancient temple of Kyichu Lhakhang which was one of 108 temples built by Songtsen Gampo, an important early Tibetan king, to pin down the Bon demon that was thought to hover over the whole of Tibet. The rest of the afternoon can be spent walking around the town searching through some of the great handicraft shops for the all-important souvenirs, or simply relaxing in a café watching life go slowly by.

(If the flight to Paro is cancelled you will drive back to Paro over the next two days. Your sightseeing in Paro will then be rearranged accordingly).

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

Day 14: Drive to Cheli La Pass. Walk to Kila Gompa Nunnery. Time at leisure.

Today you will drive up to the Cheli La, a pass at 3,990m/13,090ft, a journey of about 1½ hours. In clear weather you will have wonderful views of the snow-capped mountains to the west which mark the border with Tibet. You then walk to the Kila Gompa nunnery. The gompa is surrounded by a lush forest dominated by tall firs and sparkling mountain streams tumble down slopes which are covered with a variety of wildflowers and plants. The Gompa is a peaceful retreat for Buddhist nuns who dedicate their lives to spiritual fulfilment. About 30 nuns live here, ranging in age from about 20 to 80 years. The community is one of the oldest of seven nunneries in Bhutan and was initially established in the early 9th century as a meditation site. The nuns live a life of contemplation and seclusion, with daily prayer and spiritual practice. The temple itself is surrounded by numerous meditation huts, and many hidden caves lie inside the rocky cliffs.

Following your walk you will return to Paro. The rest of the day will be at leisure.

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

Day 15: Walk to Taktsang Monastery.

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. You return to the tea house for a delicious and well deserved lunch before you descend back to the valley floor by your outward route and then drive to your hotel.



The afternoon is free for simply relaxing or doing a little last minute souvenir shopping or sightseeing. If you have brought your own bike then now is a good time to get it packed up ready for your international flight.

This evening there will be a celebratory meal in the hotel, a great opportunity to relive the many great memories of this fantastic trip.

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

Day 16: Fly to Kathmandu. Transfer to hotel.

It's time to wave farewell to your crew this morning as you board the plane for your flight to Kathmandu. This incredibly scenic flight is one to remember so make sure you have your cameras handy. Upon arrival in Kathmandu you will be met by our friendly Nepalese staff who will transfer you to your hotel. The rest of the day is free to do your own sightseeing or just to relax at the hotel.

Overnight: Shangri La Hotel, Kathmandu (Meals: B)

Day 17: Morning sightseeing tour of Kathmandu. Transfer to airport and depart for London.

Kathmandu is a fascinating city, a mixture of the modern and medieval. Rickshaws, taxis and hooting motorists add to the din and create the special atmosphere Kathmandu is so famous for.

In the morning you will have a half day guided sightseeing tour of some of the city's main sights. One of the most sacred Hindu temples of Nepal, Pashupatinath Temple, is located on both banks of the sacred Bagmati River on the eastern outskirts of Kathmandu. Pashupatinath is the most important temple dedicated to god Shiva. Later you will explore Boudhanath where you will visit the ancient Buddhist stupa. Here pilgrims from all over the Indian subcontinent circle the stupa clockwise, turning prayer wheels as they pass.

Later there will be a group transfer to the airport for your overnight flight to London.

Overnight: In flight (Meals: B)

Day 18: Arrive London.

Our grading system

Cultural Cycling Tour of Bhutan is graded as a Moderate cycling tour, as described below.

Moderate

This trip involves 8 days of cycling with rest days in between. The longest day involves a climb up to the top of the Dochu La at a height of 3,140m/10,302ft. The climb itself gains 800m/2,625ft over a gentle climb with a gradient of around 4%. This climb will take over 3 hours but there is no hurry and you are free to stop and admire the views whenever you feel like. There is of course the support vehicle travelling behind you that will be on hand to offer a lift.

Trip altitude

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

What the price includes

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

What's included:

- ✓ An English-speaking Bhutanese guide
- ✓ Bike hire
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (Flight inclusive option)
- ✓ Single, timed group airport transfers for international flights on arrival and departure
- ✓ Flights between Kathmanu and Paro and internal flights in Bhutan
- ✓ Bhutan visa and Bhutan departure tax
- ✓ Good standard hotel in Kathmandu, on a twin share and bed & breakfast basis
- ✓ In Bhutan good standard hotel accommodation in main towns and best available hotels in outlying towns, on a twin share, full board basis
- ✓ Two nights in a farmhouse homestay in Gangtey on a full board basis
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ The opportunity to attend one of our pre-trip meet in the Cotswolds

Airport transfers

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

What's not included:

- × Travel insurance
- × Visa fees for Nepal
- × Lunch and evening meals in Kathmandu
- × Optional trips
- × Bicycle Hire
- × Overseas airport departure taxes, where applicable
- × Tips

Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

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

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate. For further information about our campaign visit [For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>](https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign).

Your accommodation

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

Hotels in Bhutan

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



Shangri La Hotel, Kathmandu

The Shangri La Hotel is a 4* hotel of character, just a stone's throw from the British Embassy and only a 20 minute walk or short taxi ride into the popular tourist area of Thamel. The hotel has a swimming pool, a lovely, landscaped garden, and a choice of restaurants and bars. Recent entertainment additions include a casino and fitness centre.



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 or Similar

Despite its somewhat dark entrance hall, this relatively 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 Damchen 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.

Alternatively, the Damchen Resort is a newly renovated hotel sitting on the banks of the Puna Chhu River in the Punakha Valley. Rooms are clean, cosy and bright with good amenities, wooden furniture and nice decorative touches. The hotel is a short, easy walk from the small town of Khuruthang which has a selection of shops and restaurants.



Farmhouse Homestay, Gangtey Valley

For a truly authentic glimpse of Bhutanese rural life, spend a night or two in a homestay. Accredited by the Bhutanese Tourist Council, there are several homestay options in rural locations including Gangtey Valley, Paro Valley and Haa. Facilities may be simple but they all have bags of character. Meals, in some cases, can be taken with the family, and the food is delicious. Electricity is available in some of the homestays and all will provide hot water for washing. There may even be the chance to enjoy a hot stone bath, try your hand at archery, learn to cook like a local or take a tour of the family farm. Please note that if we have a full group, we may use two homestay properties.



Yangkhil Resort or Similar, Trongsa

Set within walking distance of Trongsa town, Yangkhil Resort is a small, relaxed establishment with gardens and great views of Trongsa Dzong and the surrounding countryside.



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.

Meal arrangements

All meals included except lunch and dinner in Kathmandu: 15 breakfasts, 13 lunches, 13 dinners.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

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

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

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

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

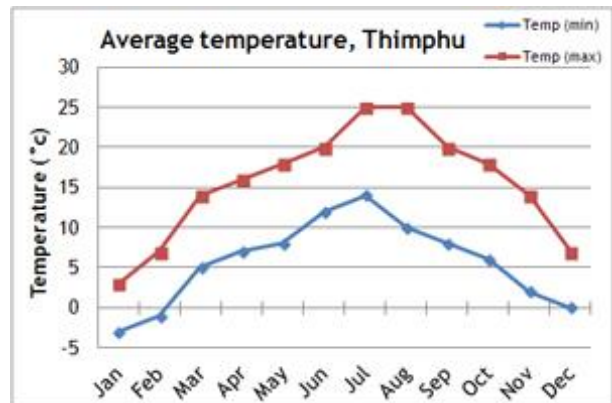
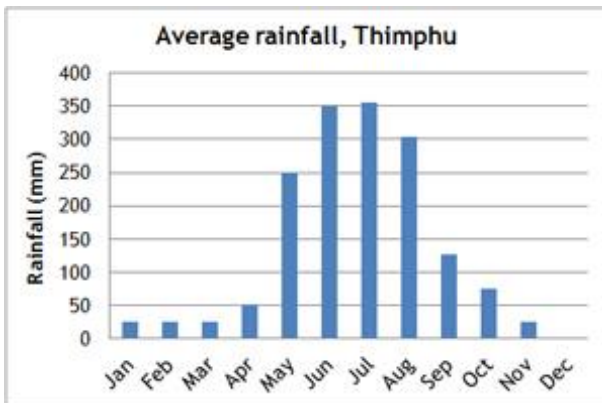
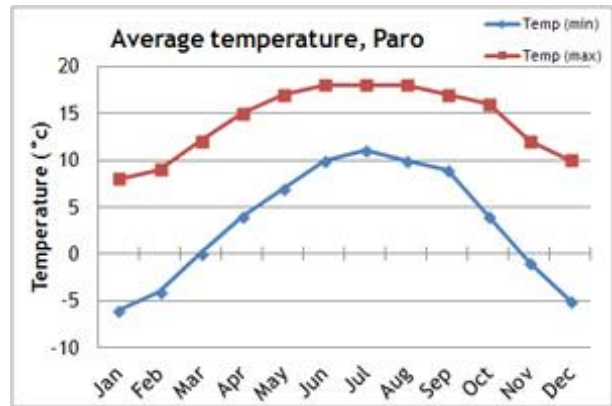
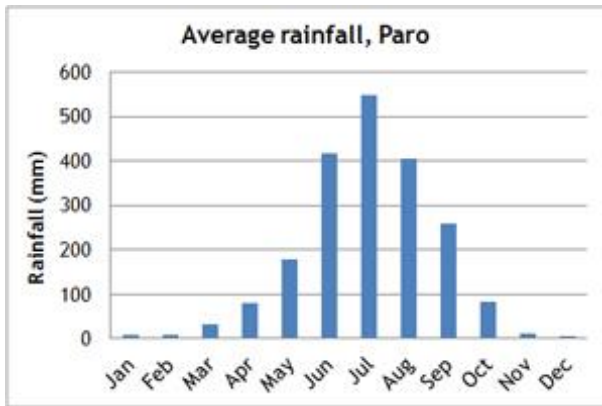
Further information

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

The nature of adventure travel

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

Climate information



Extensions

Extending your holiday

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



Hotel upgrades and extra nights in Bhutan

If you would like to extend your stay in Bhutan we are happy to arrange additional nights for you. You can choose properties that are already included in your tour, or we can suggest some fabulous alternatives from homestays to the height of luxury.

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?

- We have created a unique itinerary that avoids too many hard climbs and has an immensely varied route full of cultural interest.
- We include time at a festival and a walk to Taktsang Monastery for the complete Bhutan experience.
- For two nights in Bhutan we include a stay in a traditional family farmhouse. These homestays are government approved and give a real sense of life in rural Bhutan.
- Your tour will be led by a professional, English-speaking guide, with extensive cycling experience. They will be delighted to share their expert knowledge of the history, culture and nature of their home country.
- In Kathmandu you stay at a 4* hotel with a pool and have a half day sightseeing tour of many of the city's major sights.
- 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 cycled part of this route in 2018. If you have any questions then please give Steve a call on 10453 844400.
- We offer a flexible service and can extend your holiday with extra hotel nights, upgrades and exciting activities.
- Our maximum group size is 12 for this trip. This provides for a genuine small group experience and helps reduce the negative aspects often associated with larger groups.
- 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.
- We are an IATA accredited agent and work directly with some of the world's major airlines. If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights Manager, April, for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com 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



I really enjoyed the whole experience of cycling, seeing the country and the sights, and learning about Bhutan from our guide who was very informative. I enjoyed going to a country which is still off-the-beaten-track and seeing its culture and how it is developing.
-Miss M, Newcastle

For me, cycling is a fantastic way to see the country, get off the beaten track and have the opportunity to interact with some of the people that you meet on the way. The other tourists are welcome to their air conditioned vehicles - I will keep on pedalling!
-Ms P, Berkshire



All the arrangements went well. Good choice of hotels with some local characteristics.
-Mr H, Newcastle

...the walk to Tiger's Nest Monastery on our return to Paro was another highlight. It is the iconic sight of Bhutan for me and it lived up to expectations.
-Ms P, Berkshire



I very recently cycled the majority of this fantastic cycling adventure. From the first few minutes to the very end it was just brilliant fun! The bikes we provide in Bhutan are modern mountain bikes with disk brakes and good gear ratios. This cycling holiday is not a non-stop endurance exercise. It combines exciting cycling with meeting local Bhutanese people, seeing their culture and daily traditions, and visiting some of the kingdom's famous sights. You also get off-the-beaten-track and really close up and personal with their amazing scenery. It is such a thrill to whistle down the long descents from high passes and see friendly people waving and bowing to you as you pass by. The air is clean in the mountains and every leg of the journey is a fresh challenge. I would give this trip my highest recommendation for sheer excitement and pleasure.
-Steve Berry, MD, Mountain Kingdoms

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

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

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

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

Complete financial security

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

No Surcharge Guarantee

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

Award winning Responsible Tourism

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

Genuine small group travel

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

Loyalty Discount

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

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

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

Comprehensive information

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



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



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

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

Carbon Offsetting

Already doing:

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

Will do:

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

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Already doing:

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

Will do:

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

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

