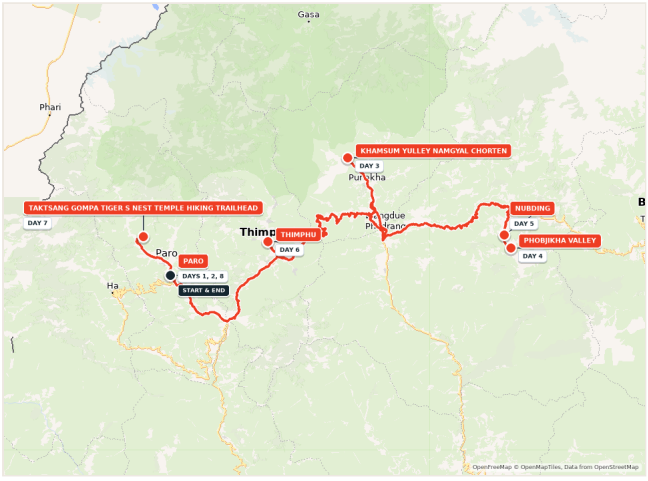
ENCOUNTERS TRAVEL

Your passport to adventure

Bhutan Encounters

COUNTRY(IES)	Bhutan
TOUR TYPE	Small Group
TRANSPORT	A/C minibus/people-carrier
GROUP SIZE	Min: 2 | Max: 12
DURATION	8 days
STARTS	Paro, Bhutan
ENDS	Paro, Bhutan
MEALS	Breakfasts - 7, Lunches - 6, Dinners - 7

TOUR ROUTE MAP **8 Days**



ROUTE: **Paro** (Start) → **Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten** → **Phobjikha Valley** → **Nubding** → **Thimphu** → **Taktsang Gompa Tiger S Nest Temple Hiking Trailhead** → **Paro** (End)

HIGHLIGHTS

Explore Temples and Dzongs of Paro, Witness the art of incense making, Cross the Dochu La Pass, Learn about local life at a village homestay, Explore the Phobjikha Valley and the capital city of Thimphu

Itinerary

DAY 1 **Kuzuzangpo La! and welcome to Bhutan. Afternoon sightseeing to Ta Dzong, Paro Dzong**

Transfer into Paro after arrival and spend time at Ta Dzong and Paro Dzong for an introduction to Bhutan's artistic, historical and architectural heritage. The National Museum and fortress complex provide two complementary perspectives on the country's past, while the later visit to the Nado Poizokhang incense factory adds a practical look at traditional production methods and local craft within the valley.

ACTIVITIES

- **Arrive at Paro International Airport**
  Arrive at Paro International Airport surrounded by dramatic Himalayan peaks. Begin your Bhutan adventure as you take in views of one of the world's most scenic airport approaches.

- **Drive from Paro Airport to Paro Hotel**
  Transfer from Paro Airport to your hotel in the Paro Valley. Settle in and get your first taste of Bhutan's warm hospitality.
- **Explore Ta Dzong in National Museum of Bhutan**
  Visit Ta Dzong, a former 17th-century watchtower that now houses the National Museum of Bhutan. Explore ancient artifacts, thangkas and exhibits that tell the story of Bhutan's history and culture.
- **Walk Paro Dzong in Fortress Monastery Tour**
  Walk down to Paro Dzong, a dramatic fortress-monastery rising from the valley floor. Wander its courtyards and corridors to see how religion and administration have long been combined in Bhutanese dzongs.
- **Explore Nado Poizokhang Incense Factory in Paro**
  Visit the Nado Poizokhang Incense Factory to learn the traditional art of incense making. Watch artisans blend herbs like juniper and sandalwood and hand-roll sticks used in temples across Bhutan.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Paro hotel	Dinner	Single room supplement (BHSGBE), Druk Air flights from Kathmandu, Druk Air flights from Delhi, Druk Air flights from Bangkok, Druk Air flights from Singapore, Extra day in Paro - pre-tour

DAY 2 Journey over the scenic Dochu La Pass, visit the fertility-blessing Chimi Lhakhang Temple.

The drive from Paro climbs to Dochu La Pass, where 108 chortens stand in a high mountain setting with Himalayan views in suitable conditions. The route then descends towards the warmer Punakha Valley. A hike through rural surroundings leads to Chimi Lhakhang, bringing together mountain travel, Buddhist heritage and village landscapes during the journey across western Bhutan.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Paro to Punakha via Dochu La Pass**
  Drive from Paro towards Punakha via the scenic Dochu La Pass. Enjoy changing views from forested hillsides to high mountain panoramas along the winding road.
- **Visit Dochu La Pass and 108 Chortens**
  Stop at Dochu La Pass, home to 108 chortens commemorating Bhutanese soldiers. Take in sweeping views of the Himalayas and soak up the peaceful atmosphere at this high mountain shrine.
- **Hike to See Chimi Lhakhang Fertility Temple**
  Hike through fields and village paths to reach Chimi Lhakhang, the temple of the “Divine Madman.” Learn about its fertility blessings and the playful legends that surround this unique pilgrimage site.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Punakha hotel	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 3

Walk to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten, visit Punakha Dzong and settle in to your Phobjikha Valley homestay

Walk towards Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten before visiting Punakha Dzong and then travelling onwards to Phobjikha Valley. The day starts among riverside fields and one of Bhutan’s major historic fortresses before climbing into cooler highland scenery. A homestay in Gangtey provides the final focus and introduces local family life after the cultural visits and substantial drive from Punakha.

ACTIVITIES

- **Riverside Walk in Mo Chhu to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten**
  Follow a scenic trail along the Mo Chhu River and through terraced fields to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten. Enjoy mountain views and glimpses of rural life as you climb to the hilltop shrine.
- **Explore Punakha Dzong in Confluence Fortress**
  Explore Punakha Dzong, a spectacular fortress at the confluence of the Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers. Wander its halls and courtyards to admire intricate woodwork, temples and river views.
- **Drive from Punakha to Phobjikha Valley (Gangtey)**
  Drive from Punakha into the broad glacial bowl of the Phobjikha Valley. Pass traditional villages and forested slopes as you ascend to the remote Gangtey region.
- **Enjoy a Gangtey Village Homestay Cultural Experience**
  Check in to a traditional homestay in Gangtey Village and meet your host family. Share stories over home-cooked meals and experience everyday Bhutanese life in a rural valley.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Gangtey Village homestay	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 4

Explore Phobjikha Valley on a nature walk, visit the revered Gangtey Monastery, and experience authentic Bhutanese life with your host family.

Spend the day in Phobjikha Valley with a nature walk followed by a visit to Gangtey Monastery. Black-necked cranes may be present during their seasonal migration, but sightings depend on timing and natural conditions. Later, join a local family and learn more about everyday life in the area. The combination of wetland scenery, religious heritage and community interaction provides several different perspectives on the valley.

ACTIVITIES

- **Phobjikha Valley Nature Walk in Crane Habitat**
  Take a gentle nature walk through the Phobjikha Valley, home to black-necked cranes in season. Enjoy rolling meadows, farmhouses and streams in one of Bhutan's most beautiful landscapes.
- **Explore Gangtey Monastery in Hilltop Monastic Complex**
  Visit Gangtey Monastery, a 17th-century gompa overlooking the Phobjikha Valley. Explore its temples, murals

and courtyards while learning about the spiritual life of the resident monks.

- **Village Life Experience in Gangtey Host Family**
  Spend time with your Gangtey host family to see how traditional farming households live. Learn about local customs, seasonal work and daily routines in this remote highland community.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Gangtey Village homestay	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 5 Head to Bhutan's modern Capital Thimphu, via Wangdue Phodrang Dzong

Travel from Gangtey to Thimphu, crossing Dochu La and stopping along the way in the Wangdue Phodrang region. Rinchengang Village introduces traditional building techniques and local community life, while the nearby viewpoint provides a perspective over Wangdue Phodrang Dzong. Continue onwards to Thimphu after a day combining scenic mountain travel with visits focused on rural Bhutanese heritage.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Gangtey to Thimphu via Dochu La Pass**
  Travel from the Phobjikha Valley back across Dochu La Pass towards Thimphu. Enjoy another chance to appreciate forested ridges, valleys and distant mountain views.
- **Explore Rinchengang Village in Traditional Stonework Settlement**
  Visit Rinchengang Village, known for its traditional stone masonry. Walk among closely clustered houses on a small hillock overlooking Wangdue Phodrang Dzong.
- **See Wangdue Phodrang Dzong from Rinchengang**
  Admire views of Wangdue Phodrang Dzong from across the valley. Learn how its strategic position and dramatic setting reflect Bhutan's historic defense and administrative needs.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Thimphu hotel	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 6 Exploring Thimphu, visit the Memorial Chorten, Folk Heritage Museum, School of Arts & Crafts & Takin Research Centre. Witness the art of incense making

Spend the day visiting several important cultural sites in Thimphu, beginning with the Memorial Chorten and Folk Heritage Museum before continuing to the School of Arts and Crafts and local artisan workshops. The Takin Conservation Centre and nunnery add ecological and spiritual perspectives, while the Weekend Market shows everyday trade. An archery demonstration at the national stadium completes the scheduled activities.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Memorial Chorten in Thimphu**
  Visit the Memorial Chorten, a whitewashed stupa built in memory of Bhutan's third king. Join local worshippers as they spin prayer wheels and walk clockwise around the shrine.
- **Explore Folk Heritage Museum in Thimphu**
  Explore the Folk Heritage Museum to see how Bhutanese families lived in traditional farmhouses. Exhibits and reconstructed rooms bring rural life and customs vividly to life.
- **Visit School of Arts and Crafts – Zorig Chusum**
  Visit the National Institute for Zorig Chusum where students train in Bhutan's 13 traditional arts. Watch young artisans practice painting, woodcarving, weaving and other heritage skills.
- **Explore Local Artisans' Workshop in Thimphu**
  Stop at a local workshop to observe artisans creating thangkas, textiles or basketry. See how long-practiced techniques are being preserved for future generations.
- **Explore Takin Conservation Centre in Thimphu**
  Visit the Takin research centre to see Bhutan's unusual national animal. Learn about the takin's biology and the efforts being made to protect this rare species.
- **Explore Thangthong Dewachen Dupthop Nunnery in Thimphu**
  Visit Thangthong Dewachen Dupthop Nunnery to glimpse the lives of Buddhist nuns. Experience a quieter side of monastic life and enjoy views back over Thimphu Valley.
- **Explore Thimphu Weekend Market**
  Stroll through Thimphu's weekend market where villagers sell produce and handicrafts. Browse stalls for local snacks, textiles and souvenirs while mingling with residents.
- **Archery Demonstration at National Stadium in Thimphu**
  If timing allows, visit the national stadium to watch an archery match. See Bhutan's national sport in action and learn about its importance in festivals and celebrations.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Thimphu hotel	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 7 Hike to Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest). Drukgyel Dzong and Kyichu Lhakhang. Optional Hot Stone bath

Begin with the hike to Taktsang Monastery before visiting Drukgyel Dzong and Kyichu Lhakhang, three sites that reflect different chapters of Paro’s spiritual and historical importance. The pace becomes more relaxed later with a Bhutanese hot stone bath, followed by a farewell dinner in a farmhouse setting. The day balances active exploration, sacred heritage and local hospitality without adding activities beyond those stated.

ACTIVITIES

- **Hike to See Taktsang Monastery – Tiger's Nest**
  Hike through pine forest and up a steep mountain path to Taktsang Monastery, the famous Tiger's Nest. Marvel at this cliff-side complex and enjoy sweeping views over the Paro Valley.

- **Explore Drukgyel Dzong Ruins in Paro Valley**
  Explore the ruins of Drukgyel Dzong, a former fortress guarding the valley's approach routes. Walk among its remaining walls and imagine the battles and victories of earlier times.
- **Explore Kyichu Lhakhang in Ancient Temple**
  Visit Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest temples dating back to the 7th century. Step inside to see ancient statues, murals and butter lamps in a deeply atmospheric shrine.
- **Traditional Hot Stone Bath in Paro**
  Relax in a traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath after your hike. Heated river stones warm the water and help soothe tired muscles in a rustic wooden tub.
- **Farmhouse Farewell Dinner in Paro**
  Enjoy a farewell dinner at a local farmhouse near Paro. Taste authentic Bhutanese dishes and share a final evening with your hosts and fellow travellers.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Paro hotel	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 8 Free time in Paro until transferring to the airport for departure

Spend the first part of the day at leisure in Paro before travelling from your hotel to the airport. No organised sightseeing is included during the final period, allowing you to rest or explore independently according to your departure time. Once at Paro International Airport, the supported arrangements conclude and you can proceed with your onward flight after completing the tour in Bhutan.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Paro**
  Spend free time in Paro for last-minute shopping or quiet reflection. Explore the town at your own pace before leaving Bhutan.
- **Drive from Paro Hotel to Paro Airport**
  Transfer from your Paro hotel to the airport for your departing flight. Say goodbye to the Paro Valley and the mountains that have framed your journey.
- **Depart from Paro International Airport**
  Check in for your international flight at Paro International Airport. Your Bhutan Encounters Tour concludes as you depart the kingdom.
- **Tour Ends in Paro**
  The Bhutan Encounters Tour ends in Paro after your airport transfer. Extensions to Kathmandu, Delhi or Bangkok can be arranged if required.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
N/A	Breakfast	Extra day in Paro - post-tour

INCLUDED

- 6 nights in carefully selected 3-star level hotels
- 1 night at a traditional village homestay in the Gangtey region
- All meals as indicated in the itinerary
- 24/7 airport transfer service
- All transport in private vehicles with driver
- Bhutan visa fee (worth US$40)
- Bhutan government Sustainable Development Fee (worth US$100/ night)
- Professional licensed local tour guide throughout
- A wealth of local experiences

EXCLUDED

- International flights (available on request)
- Travel insurance (compulsory, get a quote here)
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. Laundry)
- Entrance fees to sites visited (budget approx. US$70 p/p)
- Tips for tour leader and driver
- Any other items not mentioned above

Notes

Festival Departures

We've carefully selected some of our departure dates to coincide with Bhutan's vibrant tsechus and religious festivals that bring the dzongs (fortresses) to life with colorful masked dances, lively processions, and unique cultural performances. These festivals offer a rare glimpse into Bhutan's spiritual heart and are a truly unforgettable experience.

To ensure you fully immerse yourself in these captivating celebrations, we may adjust the itinerary slightly on these special departure dates. This allows us to maximize your time at the festivals and also takes into account the limited accommodation availability during these popular events.

Tour Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements , full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

Hot Stone Bath - Paro

Min numbers: 1

After a long day of trekking to the breathtaking Tiger's Nest Monastery, your legs might be feeling a bit weary. What better way to soothe those tired muscles and embrace the local culture than with a traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath?

Imagine sinking into a steaming wooden tub filled with mineral-rich water, heated to perfection by glowing river stones. As you soak, the warmth penetrates deep into your body, easing away any aches and pains. The addition of fragrant herbs like artemisia adds a therapeutic touch, promoting relaxation and rejuvenation.

This ancient practice, known as Dotsho, is more than just a bath – it's a holistic experience that connects you to the Bhutanese way of life. It's the perfect way to unwind after a day of adventure

Thangka Painting Workshop

Min numbers: 1

Immerse yourself in the vibrant world of Bhutanese art with a Thangka painting workshop.

Under the guidance of a master artist, learn the intricate techniques and symbolism behind these sacred works of art. Create your own unique Thangka, a beautiful and meaningful souvenir to treasure long after your journey through Bhutan.

Workshops typically take place in Thimphu, the capital city, but may be held in other picturesque locations throughout your tour, depending on the artist's availability.

Druk Air flights from Singapore

Min numbers: 1

This option provides a return Economy class flight ticket with Bhutan's national airline Druk Air between Singapore and Paro in Bhutan. Final prices will be confirmed at the time of booking based on current availability and exchange rates.

Druk Air flights from Kathmandu

Min numbers: 1

This option provides a return Economy class flight ticket with Bhutan's national airline Druk Air between Kathmandu in Nepal and Paro in Bhutan. Final prices will be confirmed at the time of booking based on current availability and exchange rates. Please contact us if you would also like us to add airport transfers, accommodation and any tours or activities in Kathmandu or further afield in Nepal as well.

Druk Air flights from Delhi

Min numbers: 1

This option provides a return Economy class flight ticket with Bhutan's national airline Druk Air between Delhi in India and Paro in Bhutan. Final prices will be confirmed at the time of booking based on current availability and

exchange rates. Please contact us if you would also like us to add airport transfers, accommodation and any tours or activities in Delhi or further afield in India as well.

Druk Air flights from Bangkok *Min numbers: 1*

This option provides a return Economy class flight ticket with Bhutan's national airline Druk Air between Bangkok in Thailand and Paro in Bhutan. Final prices will be confirmed at the time of booking based on current availability and exchange rates. Please contact us if you would also like us to add airport transfers, accommodation and any tours or activities in Bangkok or further afield in Thailand as well.

Important Notes

1 Accommodation

The accommodation on this tour is at the Bhutanese 3-star level. Like all aspects of tourism in Bhutan, hotels used for tourists are strictly regulated and inspected and all must reach a good standard to obtain their license to cater for tourists. So, you should expect good clean rooms, en-suite bathrooms, and some traditional Bhutanese styling in the building's architecture and design. We use the following hotels on many of our tour departures but others may also be used from time to time subject to availability and our satisfaction with service being provided at the time.

Paro – Mandala Hotel
Thimphu – Ariya Hotel
Punakha Valley – RKOP Green Resort
Gangtey/Phobjikha – Gakiling Guest House

Please check the Single Room Supplement option for details on room sharing options and charges for solo travellers on this tour.

2 Transport

We use modern people-carriers or minibuses for this tour, based on the final number of people in the group or in your party.

3 Transfers

Your airport transfers are only included on the first and last day of the set tour itinerary, plus on any additional days if you book your hotel room with us. If you make your own arrangements for additional accommodation at either the beginning or the end of the tour then you will need to arrange your own airport transfers on these days.

4 International Flights

We want to give you as much flexibility as possible when it comes to booking your holiday with us. So, to take account of people with varying travel plans, we don't include your international flights in the main tour price. We are however very happy to make suggestions for flights to go with your tour.

There are two considerations when it comes to flights to connect with this tour.

Flights into Bhutan

Druk Air is the Bhutanese national airline and the main airline for flying in and out of Bhutan. The airline flies daily to Bangkok, with flights slightly less frequently to other destinations including Kathmandu, Delhi, Kolkata and Singapore. Fares are cheapest to Kathmandu, followed by Delhi, Kolkata, Bangkok and Singapore being most expensive. Bhutan's first private airline, Bhutan Airlines, provides extra capacity with flights from Bangkok, Kolkata, Delhi and Kathmandu.

Unfortunately at the moment, neither Druk Air or Bhutan Airlines code-share with any other airline or connect with the international flight system. This means that you can't buy a flight ticket from your home country all the way to Bhutan. You need to buy two tickets, one with Druk Air/Bhutan Airlines, and one with an international airline to connect with the flight into Bhutan. You'll need to collect your luggage and re-check in between the two flights. You therefore need to allow plenty of time between the two flights in case of any delays - if you miss the Druk Air/Bhutan Airlines flight on the way out, or your international flight on the way home, then the airlines will not be obliged to arrange a new flight for you and you may need to pay for a new ticket (if available).

Nearly everyone travelling to Bhutan therefore adds a short stay of at least one night in Nepal, India, Thailand or Singapore at either end of their tour. We are happy to make all these arrangements for you.

Please contact us with your preferred dates and departure airport and we'll give you a selection of airlines, times and fares to choose from. Your airport arrival & departure transfers in Bhutan are included whether you book your flights independently or through us.

Flight CO2 Emissions:

Traveling by air is an amazing way to explore the world, but flights also contribute to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that impact the environment. By considering the airline's CO2 emissions when you choose your flight, you can help minimize your travel footprint.

When selecting your international flights and airline, we do therefore recommend that you try and also take into account the flight CO2 emissions. Some airlines and flight search websites (eg. Google Flights, Skyscanner) do publish this information, so you can compare between your flight options and make an informed decision. Thankfully, many airlines are working towards sustainability efforts, and choosing a greener option allows you to contribute to positive change while still enjoying your incredible adventure.

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5 Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

We are committed to running small groups on our trips in Bhutan, as we feel this gives everyone in the group the best chance to get to know their fellow travellers and to hear and make the most of their guide. It also allows us to be more creative with the itinerary and do things which would not be possible with larger groups. So, we set our Bhutan group departures to have a maximum of 12 travellers.

Tailor-made tours are available for any number of travellers from one upwards. Discounts apply if there are 3 or more people in your group.

Fully trained English-speaking Bhutanese guides are provided to escort you throughout this tour and many of our travellers consider them a highlight of their tour. Some tours (such as bird watching or trekking tours) will have specialist guides chosen based on the itinerary and activities included on the tour.

At Encounters Travel we only use local Bhutanese guides and drivers. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing.

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6 Entrance Fees - Bhutan

From September 2022, new Bhutanese government rules apply to both the pricing charged for tourisit visitors to Bhutan, and also to entrance fees. Formerly, entrance fees to Dzongs an dother sites were included in the government royalty charged to all tourists. This is no longer the case and the new USD 200 per night Sustainable Development Fee no longer covers entrance to sites visited. Instead, tourists will now need to pay new entrance fees for various sites visited during their tours. An approximate budget to allow for entrance fees visited on your tour is given in the 'Not Included' section of the tour page.

For your convenience, your tour guide will be happy to collect the entrance fees amount in US Dollars or local currency at the start of the tour and purchase the tickets on your behalf as you go along. However, as many of our tours are designed to be somewhat flexible, the budget given may change slightly depending on the sites visited during your trip. A more detailed list is given below.
USD 1 = approx. NU 80 (so NU 1,000 = approx. USD 12.50)

Commonly visited sites:

- Taktshang (Tigers Nest monastery, Paro Valley) - NU 2,000
- Kyichu Lhakhang (Paro Valley) - NU 1,000
- Rinpung Dzong (Paro) - NU 1,000
- Tashichho Dzong (Thimphu) - NU 1,000
- Buddha Dordenma (Thimphu) - NU 1,000
- Thimphu Memorial Chorten (Thimphu) - NU 1,000
- Punakha Dzong (Punakha) - NU 1,000
- Chimmi Lhakhang (Punakha Valley) - NU 1,000

Less visited sites:

- Dobji Dzong (Paro) - NU 1,000
- Jangtsa Dungtseg Lhakhang (Paro Valley) - NU 1,000
- Simtokha Dzong (Thimphu) - NU 1,000
- Trongsa Dzong (Trongsa) - NU 1,000
- Jampa Lhakhang (Bumthang) - NU 1,000
- Rinchending Goenpa (Phuntsholing) - NU 1,000
- Palden Tashi Choling Shedra (Phuntsholing) - NU 1,000

Note: Children aged 0-5 are exempt from these entrance fees. Children aged 6-17 will pay 50%.

Note: Entrance fees may be imposed at additional sites over time.

7 Dates and Prices

Our small-group tours in Bhutan have a range of departures through the year, concentrating on the best seasons to travel weather-wise (late September through to April/May. All departures are guaranteed to run with a minimum of 2 travellers. Departure dates and prices are listed on our website and on a separate dates & prices sheet available on request.

Tailor-made tours can be booked to start on any date or day of the week throughout the year. We like to try to time all our tours in Bhutan so that you can be in Thimphu at some stage over the weekend so that you can visit the huge weekend market there. This runs from Friday afternoon until around lunchtime on Sunday.

8 Money

The local currency in Bhutan is the Ngultrum (Ng), which is pegged to the Indian Rupee. Indian rupees are accepted widely (except 500 or 1000 rupee notes which are not accepted) so if you are entering Bhutan from India you don't need to dispose of your Indian currency before leaving the country.

All your meals, plus mineral water & tea/coffee during mealtimes are included in the price of your travel through Bhutan. You will only need to carry spending money to cover souvenirs, small offerings at temples & monasteries, alcoholic or soft drinks in your hotel or other bottled drinks during the day. There are only a few ATMs in the country (including Paro & Thimphu) where you can withdraw local currency (Visa, Mastercard) so we recommend bringing some cash in US Dollars, Euros, GB Pounds, or Indian Rupees with you that you can exchange into local currency on arrival. You can tip your guide & driver with any currency.

9 Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please contact us if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

10 Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel’s insurance policy

directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see our website or booking conditions for more information.

11 Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.
The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

12 Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

https://x.com/encounterstravl (yes, without the 'e')

13 Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? World Nomads Travel Insurance offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.

14 Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current official government travel advice for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's 'Travel Aware' campaign which provides further useful and invaluable information.

travel aware
gov.uk/travelaware

15

Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

How Water-to-Go Technology works:

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can’t fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon’s efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.

- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

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16 Private & Tailor-made Tours

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please contact us.

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17 Tipping - Bhutan

While an accepted part of the tourist industry in Bhutan (i.e. guides, drivers and hotel staff), tipping elsewhere is generally discouraged and unnecessary. Any amounts you do tip should always reflect the level of service provided.It is normal and accepted for people to tip differently, and you should not feel under any pressure to tip any particular amount.We are often asked for advice on common amounts however, and can give the following guidelines...

1-2 persons travelling:

US$8-15 pp per day for your guide & US$4-7 pp per day for your driver.

3-8 persons travelling:

US$5-10 pp per day for your guide & US$3-5 pp per day for your driver.

9-12 persons travelling:

US$4-8 pp per day for your guide & US$3-5 pp per day for your driver.

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18 Passports and Visas - Bhutan

We will arrange your Bhutan for you in advance of your arrival. You will need to provide us with:

- a scanned colour copy of your passport identity page (with your photo and personal details). This cannot be a photo showing fingers holding the passport. If you don't have a scanner, then place the passport completely flat and open on a white A4 piece of paper and take a photo of the whole piece of paper with the passport in the middle. That should suffice.
- a scanned colour passport photo (digital versions are available from most passport photo machines or shops doing passport photos now)
- a copy of your travel insurance policy certificate

Please send these to us as soon as possible after booking or at least 2 months before your arrival. The visa will normally be issued by the Bhutanese authorities around 10 days before your arrival and we will then email it to you. You will need to print the visa out and show it to the Druk Air staff when you check in. No payment is required from you for the visa at this stage or when you arrive in Bhutan - all costs are included in your tour price. .

If you are connecting the tour with Nepal, then Nepal visas are available for most nationalities on arrival in Kathmandu airport for a fee of US$25 for single entry, with an extra $20 charged for a multiple entry visa which will be required for most of our Nepal and Bhutan combination tours. This covers up to 15 days in Nepal (from first arrival to last departure). Single entry visas are also available for $40 (16-30 days) or $100 (31-90 days), again with an extra $20 fee to convert these to multiple entry.

If you are connecting the tour with time in India, then you will need to obtain an Indian visa in advance - these are not available on arrival in Indian airports. We recommend you allow a minimum of 4 weeks to apply for this visa.

If you are connecting the tour with time in Thailand, then many nationalities can arrange a free tourist visa on arrival in Bangkok airport.

Please contact us if you have any questions about visa requirements for your travel plans and nationality.

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19 Health and Vaccinations

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

Nepal: Additional vaccinations: Diptheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

Bhutan: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

India: Additional vaccinations: Diptheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Yellow fever rules for India are quite complicated and lengthy. Please read the WHO guidance.

Tibet: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the lowland regions Bhutan are considered malarial zones, while higher altitudes including central Bhutan including Paro, Thimphu, Punakha and Bumthang are not. Nepal is considered mainly low risk with prophylactics not normally required.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vacinnation may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary. Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

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20 Voltage

In Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, sockets are mainly two round pronged and 230 volts (Type C,D,M). In Bhutan a range of different sockets can be found, including two and three round pronged and three flat pronged (Type D,F,G).

Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard UK-European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are sometimes available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already but cannot be guaranteed.

If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

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21 Time

The time in India and Sri Lanka is GMT plus 5 1/2 hours.

The time in Nepal is GMT plus 5 3/4 hours.

The time in Bhutan is GMT plus 6 hours.

The time in Tibet is GMT plus 8 hours.

Daylight saving adjustments are not applied.

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22 What to take

Luggage: Whatever you're doing in Nepal, Tibet or Bhutan, you'll find that large rigid wheeled suitcases are cumbersome - you may be able to wheel them inside the airport and your hotel, but due to the condition of roads and pavements that's often about it. As many of our tours involve a degree of adventurous activity, we strongly advise you to bring a more practical bag for these i.e. a rucksack or holdall. These are easier for both your porters, and yourself to carry around. Suitcases are OK for our cultural tours in Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan though, but please aim to bring small or medium sized ones rather than very large. If you are trekking or rafting, or doing a lot of travel throughout the country, then as little as possible is the basic message. A rucksack or holdall (50-70 liter approx.) for your main luggage, and a daypack for you to use during the day should be plenty. While rafting we only take essential kit on board the rafts, and your main luggage will travel by bus to the take-out point. While trekking your porters (Nepal) or ponies (Bhutan) will carry your main luggage, leaving you with just a daypack with things you'll need during the day. You can also leave some luggage locked safely in the pre-trek hotel if you wish. We recommend that couples plan to leave one main bag behind, and pool their remaining luggage in their other bag for the porter to carry.

Luggage limits: Most international airlines allow 20-23kg per person of hold luggage. Domestic flights often have smaller allowances around 15kg. As airline rules vary we recommend that you take no more than 20kg of luggage if your tour just includes international flights, and no more than 15kg if there are any domestic flights included in your itinerary. Please ask us for details if you are unsure. Any excess baggage fees will be your responsibility to cover. Most airlines allow between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage so we suggest that you take no more than 5kg unless you have confirmed that your airline(s) will allow more than this.

If you are trekking with us, we ask that you keep the weight of your main bag that the porter will carry to a maximum of 12.5kg. This then allows the porter to carry up to 2 bags, and a maximum of 25kg (the International Porter Protection group's advised limit for Nepal is 30kg, which then leaves a little more weight for their own kit). This weight allowance includes your sleeping bag if you are hiring it from us and not carrying it with you to Nepal
If you are doing an Everest trek and flying from Kathmandu to Lukla, then flight luggage limits are 10kg for your main bag and 5kg for hand luggage - total 15kg. You can re-arrange that after you arrive in Lukla. Please keep to these limits as while you can pay for extra weight, it may be held back until the next flight which may then be delayed or cancelled.
Treks in Bhutan follow the same weight limits for your ponies.
You may leave other luggage securely locked in your hotel during the trek. If you are travelling as a couple then we suggest you leave one main bag in Kathmandu and share the other main bag that the porter will then carry.

Clothing & Climate: Nepal and Bhutan have a climate that ranges widely depending on when you visit, and where you are visiting.
- Autumn - late Sep-Nov: The weather is good and very warm, with lots of sunshine, getting quite hot during the day in lowland regions. It will still be cold at night at higher altitudes if you are trekking. Shorts & T-shirts are fine while you are walking, but you should still bring warmer clothes for the evenings. There is a good chance of rain in

September and early October, so bring a waterproof.
- Winter - Dec-Feb: It will be pleasant in lowland regions with very little rain, but will be cooler at night. Long trousers and shirts are advised during the day, and you will need warm clothes in the evenings. If you are trekking, then it will be cold during the day, and extremely cold at night, particularly at higher altitudes. Several warm layers are recommended so you can regulate your comfort as you walk, including a waterproof, even if only to protect from cold winds. We include thick down jackets in our optional trekking packs for comfort in the evenings at higher altitudes.
- Spring - Mar-May: The weather is very pleasant during the spring, and again shorts & t-shirts are fine while you are walking. There is a higher chance of rain as the season progresses, so a thin waterproof is recommended in case. It gets very hot and humid in the lowlands from May onwards.
- Monsoon - Jun-mid Sep: It will be hot and sticky during these months, with lots of rain, so come prepared accordingly if you are visiting during these months - gaiters are highly recommended if you are trekking to keep out leeches.

A huge variety of cheap trekking gear is available in Kathmandu (fleeces, waterproofs etc.) and buying some here can save you carrying it with you, and support the local economy. However, you should definitely bring your own walking boots.

Modesty rates highly in Nepal and Bhutan especially for women, so please ensure all clothes are loose fitting and not too revealing. You'll find the Bhutanese dress fairly smartly or in national dress, so you will stand out even more if you look scruffy.

Whilst rafting:

On the raft: Shorts, Tevas (sandals) or trainers, baseball style cap to keep the sun off your face, sunglasses with a strap to keep them on your head, swimwear, sarong for women, sun-cream, lip balm, water bottle, several t-shirts. Note: All footwear on a raft should be rubber soled, and of the type that will not come off easily.
Off the raft: Long trousers, warm sleeping bag (provided, but you may want to bring a sheet sleeping bag as well), petzel type head torch, warm jacket/fleece, dry shoes, boots, warm socks, towel, warm long sleeved shirt, toiletries.
Cameras: You can take cameras on the raft, and we endeavour to keep that sort of kit dry in waterproof bags. But there is always an element of risk of getting the camera wet.
What you shouldn't take on the raft: All the rest of your kit and you're your valuables. We will make arrangements for their transport to your take-out point.

Whilst trekking:

Suggested Clothing and equipment: Strong hiking boots or walking shoes that you have broken in; Good sized rucksack or holdall; 3 to 4-season sleeping bag (only if you want to use your own rather than the one provided in our optional trekking pack); silk or cotton sleeping bag liner; lightweight waterproof and windproof jacket; (waterproof gaiters, waterproof over trousers - these are only necessary on some treks in some seasons - contact us for further info if required); 3 or 4 t-shirts; small day pack; several pairs of light socks; 2 pairs of heavier woollen socks; underwear including thermals; warm hat and gloves; swimwear; pair of lightweight trousers; pair of shorts; 1 fleece or warm jumper and 1 sweatshirt. Also, sunglasses, torch and batteries, toiletries (include a lighter to burn toilet paper), bring biodegradable shampoo & soap, towel, blister kit, money belt and any personal medication you

might require. Remember, Lots of layers are the key to staying warm and comfortable. Also, keeping your feet comfortable and healthy makes a huge difference to how you enjoy your trek. So, bring waterproof boots/walking shoes and plenty of pairs of socks so you can change them regularly.

Day Packs and Main luggage: You will want a sturdy and comfortable daypack to carry your day-to-day items with you while you are walking (clothes you may change in and out of regularly, drinks, snacks, camera). You will also need a sturdy holdall or backpack for your main luggage. Your porters or ponies will carry this for you, so suitcases are not appropriate. They may leave earlier than you, and may not walk with you throughout the entire day, so bear in mind that you won't have access to this luggage all the time - you need to ensure you are carrying everything you require during the days walk in your daypack. You can leave luggage behind in storage at your hotel so you don't need to take everything with you on the trek.

Whilst in the game parks:

You should bring long trousers and long-sleeved shirts for jungle walks and travel within the park. Please ensure these are of drab colours to avoid drawing attention. Sunglasses and sun-hats are advisable for hot and bright days. Mosquito repellent is highly recommended. Binoculars are extremely useful at any of Nepal's National Parks, and are not generally available for hire locally. Don't forget fast film for those jungle shots and moving animals/birds. A good cleaning kit is essential as these items are unavailable once at the park. It is also better to take quality film, either from home or Kathmandu into the parks, and to ensure you have a spare fully charged battery and memory card.

All tours: We recommend that you bring a sun hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, a basic first aid kit, toiletries, money belt, small torch, camera & charger.
