

## Bhutan Encounters

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**Country(ies):** Bhutan

**Tour type:** Small Group

**Transport:** A/C minibus/people-carrier

**Group size:** Min: 2 | Max: 12

**Days:** 8 days

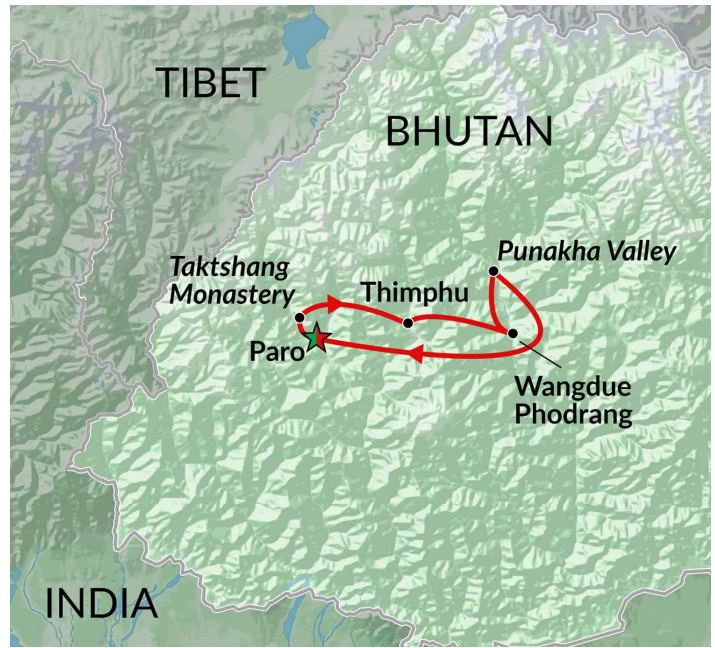
**Start Location:** Paro, Bhutan

**End Location:** Paro, Bhutan

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 7, Lunches - 6, Dinners - 7

**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 and learn the art of incense making

Prepare to be awestruck as your flight descends into Paro International Airport, a dramatic spectacle that unfolds amidst a breathtaking panorama of Himalayan peaks. This architectural gem, often lauded as the world's most beautiful airport, offers a tantalizing glimpse into the magic that awaits you in Bhutan.

After settling in, your adventure begins with a journey back in time to the Ta Dzong, a captivating 17th-century watchtower perched on a hilltop overlooking the Paro valley. Now home to the National Museum of Bhutan, this unique circular building invites you to explore a treasure trove of ancient artifacts, exquisite thangkas (religious scroll paintings), and intricate bronze statues. Unravel the mysteries of Bhutan's rich history and cultural heritage within these ancient walls.

Next, we'll walk to Paro Dzong, a majestic fortress-monastery that rises dramatically from the valley floor. This architectural masterpiece, a symbol of Bhutan's harmonious blend of spiritual and secular authority, has witnessed centuries of history unfold within its courtyards. Wander through its labyrinthine corridors, discover hidden temples, and learn how these imposing dzongs have shaped the destiny of Bhutan.

But the cultural immersion doesn't stop there! Venture into the heart of Bhutanese tradition with a visit to the Nado Poizokhang Incense Factory. Inhale the intoxicating aromas of juniper, sandalwood, and other sacred herbs as you witness the ancient art of incense making. Observe skilled artisans meticulously blending ingredients and hand-rolling incense sticks, an integral part of Bhutanese life and Buddhist rituals.

You'll spend your first night in Bhutan at a hotel in Paro.

**OVERNIGHT:** Paro hotel

**MEALS:** Dinner

**EXTRAS:** 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.

Today, buckle up for an exhilarating adventure as we ascend the legendary Dochu La Pass, a winding mountain road that climbs through a tapestry of emerald forests to an elevation of 3,050 meters (10,007 feet). Feast your eyes on breathtaking vistas of snow-capped Himalayan peaks and verdant valleys that unfold with every twist and turn.

As you reach the summit, be mesmerized by the 108 chortens (stupas) that adorn the pass, a poignant memorial to Bhutanese soldiers who lost their lives in a 2003 battle against insurgents. The serenity of this sacred site, combined with the panoramic views, creates an unforgettable experience.

Descending into the fertile Punakha Valley, we embark on a short but rewarding hike to the Chimi Lhakhang Temple, a pilgrimage site renowned for its association with Lama Drukpa Kuenley, the revered and somewhat eccentric "Divine Madman." Known for his unconventional teaching methods and affinity for wine and women, this 15th-century Buddhist master is believed to bless women with fertility. Embrace the vibrant atmosphere of this sacred site, adorned with colorful phalluses and imbued with a playful spirit.

**OVERNIGHT:** Punakha hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

### **Day 3: Walk to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten, visit Punakha Dzong and settle in to your Phobjikha Valley homestay**

Lace up your boots and get ready for an invigorating morning walk. Our destination: the magnificent Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten. But the journey is just as rewarding as the destination itself. We'll follow a scenic trail that winds along the gushing Mo Chhu River, passing through a kaleidoscope of terraced fields bursting with colorful chilies and vegetables. Keep your eyes peeled for playful monkeys swinging through the trees and vibrant birds flitting amongst the blossoms. Reaching the hilltop chorten, you'll be rewarded with breathtaking panoramas of the Punakha Valley – the perfect spot to snap some Instagram-worthy photos!

Next, prepare to be dazzled by the architectural marvel that is Punakha Dzong. This majestic fortress, nestled dramatically at the confluence of the Phochu and Mochu rivers, is like something out of a fairytale. Legend has it that these two rivers, representing the father and mother, symbolize the harmonious balance of masculine and feminine energies. Explore the dzong's labyrinthine corridors, marvel at its intricate artwork and towering walls, and uncover the secrets hidden within its sacred temples.

After lunch, we'll hit the road for a scenic drive to the enchanting Phobjikha Valley. The journey is an adventure in itself, winding through lush landscapes and offering glimpses of traditional villages perched on hillsides. As we approach Gangtey, get ready to trade your boots for a taste of authentic Bhutanese life. A warm welcome awaits you at your traditional village homestay, where you'll be immersed in the heart of this captivating community. Share stories with your local hosts, savour and learn how to prepare delicious home-cooked meals, and discover the unique customs and traditions that make this valley so special. Get ready for an unforgettable cultural exchange!

**OVERNIGHT:** Gangtey Village homestay

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

### **Day 4: Explore Phobjikha Valley on a nature walk, visit the revered Gangtey Monastery, and experience authentic Bhutanese life with your host family.**

Today, immerse yourself in the natural wonders and cultural riches of the Phobjikha Valley. Embark on a leisurely nature walk through this breathtaking landscape, a haven for a remarkable variety of flora and fauna. Keep your eyes peeled for the majestic black-necked cranes, which grace the valley with their presence from October to March after an epic migration over the Himalayas. These elegant birds hold a special place in Bhutanese hearts, and if you're lucky enough to visit in November, you might even witness the vibrant Crane Festival, a celebration of their arrival.

As you wander through the valley, soak in the serenity of the surroundings – rolling hills, pristine streams, and charming farmhouses dotting the landscape. Breathe in the crisp mountain air and listen to the symphony of birdsong. This is a true escape into nature's embrace.

Next, we'll venture to the spiritual heart of the valley, the revered Gangtey Monastery. Perched on a hilltop overlooking the valley, this 17th-century monastery exudes an aura of tranquility and grandeur. Explore its intricate architecture, vibrant murals, and sacred relics, and perhaps even witness the monks engaged in their daily rituals.

But the cultural immersion doesn't end there! Spend some time with your warm and welcoming host family, delving deeper into the rhythms of village life. Learn about their traditional Bhutanese lifestyle, their agricultural practices, and their unique customs. Share stories, laughter, and perhaps even a cup of traditional butter tea. This is your chance to forge genuine connections and gain a deeper understanding of Bhutanese culture at a grassroots level.

**OVERNIGHT:** Gangtey Village homestay

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

## **Day 5: Head to Bhutan's modern Capital Thimphu, via Wangdue Phodrang Dzong**

Today, retrace your way back across Dochu La Pass towards the modern capital, Thimphu. En route, stop at the Rinchengang Village. This village is a small bunched village in front of the Wangdue Dzong and is famous for its proficiency in traditional means of stonework. It is believed to be one of the oldest villages in Bhutan is worth a visit. Rinchengang village is located opposite to the Wangdue Phodrang Dzong and Punatsangchhu runs along the highway. The topography of the village attributes to the attraction. The array of traditional houses clustered neatly on a tiny hillock overlooks the imposing Wangdue Phodrang Dzong. Continue your journey through lush forests and scenic valleys before arriving in Thimphu, where tradition meets modernity.

After soaking in the atmosphere of this ancient dzong, we'll continue our journey to Thimphu, where the vibrant energy of Bhutan's modern capital awaits. Get ready to explore bustling markets, encounter impressive monuments, and delve into the heart of this captivating city.

**OVERNIGHT:** Thimphu hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

## **Day 6: Exploring Thimphu, visit the Memorial Chorten, Folk Heritage Museum, School of Arts & Crafts & Takin Research Centre**

Today promises a captivating exploration of Thimphu's cultural treasures. We begin our journey at the Memorial Chorten, a revered monument that embodies Bhutanese spirituality and architectural grandeur.

Next, we delve into the rich tapestry of Bhutanese life at the Folk Heritage Museum, where captivating exhibits showcase traditional lifestyles, artifacts, and customs.

Our journey continues to the School of Arts & Crafts (also known as the National Institute for Zorig Chusum), where we'll witness the meticulous dedication of students mastering the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan.

Prepare to be enchanted as we immerse ourselves in the world of local artisans. Our guide will lead us to a workshop where we can observe the intricate skills involved in creating exquisite Thangka paintings, vibrant woven textiles, or perhaps the delicate art of basket weaving. The specific craft we encounter will depend on the day's opportunities and the interests of our group, ensuring a unique and personalized experience.

In the afternoon, we'll venture to the Takin research centre, home to Bhutan's unique national animal. Here, we'll learn about the fascinating biology and conservation efforts surrounding this unusual creature.

To offer a different perspective, we'll also visit the Thangthong Dewachen Dupthop Nunnery. Unlike the dzongs we've seen so far, which primarily house monks, this nunnery provides insight into the lives of female practitioners and their role in Bhutanese Buddhism.

To end the day, we'll visit the vibrant weekend market, a bustling hub of local life where you can discover authentic Bhutanese handicrafts and perhaps find a special memento to treasure.

And if the timing is right, we'll make a stop at the national stadium to witness the thrilling spectacle of an archery tournament, a sport deeply ingrained in Bhutanese culture.

**OVERNIGHT:** Thimphu hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

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

Rise early, as today we embark on a pilgrimage to Bhutan's most iconic landmark – the breathtaking Taktsang Monastery, also known as the Tiger's Nest. Prepare your legs and your spirit for an invigorating 2-3 hour hike that winds its way through pine forests and up a steep mountain path. But trust us, every step is worth it! As you ascend, the legendary monastery will slowly reveal itself, perched dramatically on a sheer cliff face 800 meters above the valley floor. This sacred site, steeped in history and legend, attracts pilgrims from all corners of Bhutan and beyond, all drawn to its spiritual aura and unparalleled beauty.

Once you arrive, take a moment to catch your breath and soak in the awe-inspiring views. Explore the intricate temples and shrines that cling to the cliffside, each one adorned with vibrant colors and intricate details. Listen closely, and you might hear the whispers of ancient prayers carried on the mountain breeze.

In the afternoon, we'll journey to the ruins of Drukgyel Dzong, a historic fortress that once protected the valley from invaders. Imagine the battles fought and the victories won within these crumbling walls as you wander through the remnants of this once-mighty stronghold.

Our final stop will be the serene Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest and most sacred temples. Dating back to the 7th century, this spiritual haven exudes a sense of tranquility and timeless devotion. Step inside and feel the weight of history as you admire the ancient murals and flickering butter lamps.

As the day draws to a close, why not reward your tired muscles with a truly authentic Bhutanese experience? Immerse yourself in a traditional hot stone bath, where the soothing heat of the stones will melt away any aches and leave you feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. It's the perfect way to end a week of adventure.

For our last evening together, we've arranged a delightful farewell dinner at a nearby farmhouse. You can expect authentic Bhutanese cuisine and a chance to experience the warm hospitality of a local family.

**OVERNIGHT:** Paro hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

## **Day 8: Free time in Paro until transferring to the airport for departure**

Your time is free until we transfer you to the airport for departure. We can book your international Druk Air flights into Bhutan and extension options in Kathmandu, Delhi and Bangkok are available to enable connections to your onward flights.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** 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)
- 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.

# Options

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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.

## Single room supplement (BHSGBE)

Min numbers: 1

The tour price is based on 2 people sharing twin/double rooms. This option books a single room in all the accommodation throughout the tour. If you are a single traveller and would be happy to share a room, let us know and we will see if we can pair you up with another single traveller of the same sex. If a room share is not available when you book then we will add the single room supplement to your booking and it will be payable with your balance payment unless we have arranged a room share for you by then. If a room share is arranged after you have paid the supplement then we will refund it to you. Room shares are arranged in order of booking.

**Note:** Single supplement prices may vary seasonally.

## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 tourists to Bhutan, and also to entrance fees. Formerly, entrance fees to Dzongs and other 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 Duntseg Lhakhang (Paro Valley) - NU 1,000
- Simtokha Dzong (Thimphu) - NU 1,000
- Trongsa Dzong (Trongsa) - NU 1,000
- Jampa Lhakhang (Bumthang) - NU 1,000
- Rinchening 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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).

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## 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](http://www.facebook.com/encounterstravel)

<https://x.com/encounterstravel> (yes, without the 'e')

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## 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.**

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## **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.



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## **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: Diphtheria, 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: Diphtheria, 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 vaccination 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.

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**Note:** Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.

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