



Dharma Path to Bhutan

February 27th to March 7TH 2012

with Lori Furbush and

Bhutanese Guide Tshering Jamtsho

10 Days Cultural Tour (Including the Punakha Tsechu Festival)



Located high in the majestic Himalayas and nestled between Tibet and India is the small Kingdom of Bhutan. The local inhabitants call this *Druk Yul*, the “land of the peaceful dragon.” Every day we will practice meditation and QiQong/Yoga with Lori.

For years, Bhutan deliberately isolated itself from the outside world and has only recently opened its borders to visitors. In Bhutan, the Buddhist culture is integrated into every aspect of daily life, and those fortunate enough to visit describe it as a unique, deeply spiritual, and mystical experience.

Day 1: Feb 27th Depart for Bangkok

Day 2: Feb 28th Arrive Bangkok, afternoon tour of the city

Day 3: Feb 29th Arrive Bhutan and drive to Thimphu

The flight into Bhutan will take you over the vast plains of the Indian subcontinent and then over the dense green vegetation of the Kingdom’s sub-Himalayan ranges. You will get breathtaking views of the world’s highest and most majestic peaks as the plane approaches the Dragon Kingdom’s cloud scraping airstrip at the Paro International airport at an altitude of 7330 ft.

Moments before the landing, you can catch glimpses of the fertile valley of Paro and the winding Paro Chu (river) and the historical Rimpung Dzong (fortress) more popularly known as *Paro Dzong*. As you step out of the aircraft, you can catch your first breath of the fresh crisp Himalayan air.

Our representative will be there to receive you after you have completed the necessary immigration and visa formalities. From here, we will drive straight to Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan. The drive from Paro to Thimphu is beautiful. The first part of the journey will follow the Paro river and provide plenty of photo opportunities. After about half an hour's drive, you will reach the confluence of two rivers,



one flowing from Thimphu and the other from Paro. From the confluence, we will follow the Thimphu river for another hour. As you enter into Thimphu, you will see the traffic being controlled by traffic men as there are no traffic lights in the Kingdom.

Day 4: March 1ST Visit a local Monastery

Today we will take early morning pilgrimage to local monastery and chant with the monks. Afterward we will visit the Buddha Dordenma is a bronze statue, a 'Vajra Throne' Buddha overlooking Thimphu city, about 100 metres (330 ft) above the Wang Chuu river. We will string prayer flags as is the custom in Bhutan. After lunch we will visit the Textile Museum, and local fruit vegetable and handicraft market. If time permits, we will visit the Thimphu Memorial Stupa, a beautiful landmark built in memory of our late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck Thimphu. (7,600ft)

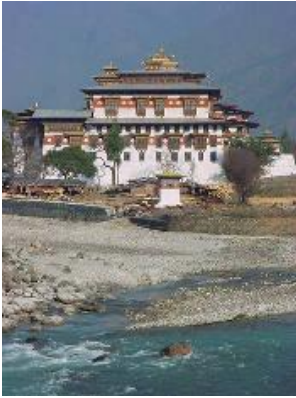
Day 5: March 2ND Drive to Punakha

Today we will start early for Punakha, the old capital of Bhutan. The journey will take about three hours. It will take you across the Dochula Pass (3050M) with a spectacular view of the eastern Himalayas. The pass is also marked by 108 stupas dedicated to world peace by Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. The descent will take us through sub tropical vegetation and into Punakha. Visit the festival at the Punakha Dzong in the afternoon. Something about this place commands our reverence. The rivers that flank the monastery are called the Mo Chu (Mother) and Po Chu (Father), and indeed, Punakha is where modern Bhutan was born. This has been considered a deeply auspicious site since the 14th century, and all seems timeless and serene.

Day 6: March 3RD Punakha Tsechu festival

The next day, we will enjoy the festival. We will witness masked dance performances called *Tshechus*. Morality plays choreographed to music, these dances meld spiritual instruction, theater, and comic relief into a single, highly anticipated social event.

The Punakha Dzong, built in 1637, was once the old capital of Bhutan and is today the winter residence of the Central Monastic Body. The Dzong occupies an important place in the history of monarchy in Bhutan as the first King of Bhutan, King Ugyen Wangchuck was crowned here in 1907.



The Dzong also houses Bhutan's most sacred relic, the Ranjung Kharsapani (the self created image of Avolokitesvara). The inner-most sanctum of the temple houses the Marchen Lhakhang, containing the embalmed body of the Shabdrung, the first secular leader of Bhutan. Today the Dzong also serves as the headquarters to the District Administration.

In the evening, the group can indulge in a traditional hot stone water bath. It can be arranged upon request with the hotel management on payment basis.

A booklet containing a detailed program will be provided to all the group members. The Tshechu is a festival in honor of Padmasambhava (one born from the lotus flower) and popularly known as "Guru Rinpoche" the precious teacher. Religious festivals, or Tsechus, are held annually in Dzongs (fortress monasteries) throughout the country. Many outstanding Buddhist saints like Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century, and Pemalingpa, Shabdrung and Dorjilingpa in the 14th to 16th centuries resorted to dances to subdue demons and evil spirits, and to overcome obstacles that were preventing the spread of Buddhism in the high Himalayan valleys.



From the roof of the Dzong, monks blow on a pair of long horns, and the sound of cymbals, drums and trumpets fill the air. These dance festivals revive the people spiritually and in many ways refine them culturally because the dances communicate moral lessons, and both the performer and the observer benefit from the exchange. The Bardo



dances, the main event of the tsechu festival, serve as a reminder to Bhutanese of their future destiny depending on their past and present deeds. The dance of Noblemen and Ladies tells the story of flirting princesses who are punished for their indiscretions. The dance of the Stag enacts the tale of a hunter who was converted to Buddhism and gave up hunting. The Paro and Wangdi Tsechus end with the unveiling of a huge religious Thangka or *Thongdrol* (meaning "liberation or enlightenment on sight").

Day 7: March 4TH Punakha-Paro

Today we will drive through Thimphu, en route to Paro, and stop for lunch at the Swiss Bakery. On arrival in Paro, if time permits, you can go for a promenade through Paro Town. Overnight in Paro. (7,600 ft)

Day 8: March 5TH Local sightseeing in Paro

The day begins with a drive through Paro valley to see the Drukgyel Dzong, a historical Dzong for the Bhutanese. This was the place where the last of the Tibetan invaders were repelled, hence the name *Drukgyel Dzong*, meaning the "Fortress of the victorious Drukpas".

On a clear day, one can see the 24,000-ft domed majestic Jumolhari in the background of the fortress, blessing the Paro valley. It is believed that the goddess Jumo resides on this sacred mountain.

On the way to Drukgyel Dzong, you will be able to see the Kichu Lhakang, which was built in 659 (7th century) by the Tibetan King Tshongtsen Gampo. It is believed he built 108 temples across the Himalayas and Kichu happens to be one of the last remaining ones.



Further up the valley you will see the majestic Taktsang (Tigers Lair), clinging onto bare rock face. After lunch visit the National Museum, located in the Ta Dzong (old watch tower for the Paro Dzong), originally built in 1656. This is the only museum in

Paro and has the country's best collection of ancient Thangkas (religious wall hangings), religious paintings and artifacts, fine textiles, weapons, and stamps. It also houses the unique temple of the tree of life, representing the four different sects of Buddhism, as practiced in the country. Overnight in Paro.

Day 9: March 6TH After breakfast, hike to Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery, which is the most famous monastery in Bhutan. Guru Rinpoche, an Indian saint is said to have flown on the back of a tigress from Singye Dzong in Lhuntse to meditate in a cave where Taktsang Monastery now stands. It is perched on the edge of a steep cliff, about 900 meters above Paro Valley. The hike to reach the viewpoint to the monastery makes for a nice half-day excursion. Hike back to Paro. In the evening you can explore Paro town. Overnight hotel in Paro.



Day 10: March 7TH

Our guide will help you with the departure formalities at the airport and bid you good bye with traditional Tashi Khadhar.

ABOUT OUR GUIDE



Tshering Jamtsho

Tshering Jamtsho can be rated among the first well-trained tour leaders in the country. He has extensive knowledge in the field of tourism in Bhutan. His knowledge of Buddhism, Bhutanese culture, history, and environment has earned him many friends around the globe and through these networks he has also been invited as a guest speaker to speak at the California institute of Integral Studies on Buddhism and local Bhutanese deities. Tshering is the founder and proprietor of Sky Travels. With an experience of over quarter of a century in the Bhutanese travel industry, Tshering Jamtsho is today one of the leading tour operators in the Kingdom of Bhutan. For every trip, Tshering Jamtsho is personally involved in ensuring

that every minute detail relating to travel logistics, travel advisory, and special needs of the individual clients is meticulously planned.

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Spirit of Bhutan

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TRIP INCLUDES :

9 Nights Hotels and all meals
Round Trip Air from Bangkok to Bhutan
Guide Services provided by Tshering Jamtsho
Hike to Tiger's nest
Includes Daily tourist fee
All Tours and Transportation

\$3898.00

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