Festivals of Bhutan - Andrew Tomlinson

Trip Code: BDTK

Version:

CULTURE	GUIDED GROUP	LEISURELY 2



HIGHLIGHTS

- Join the festivities at one of Bhutan's colourful festivals or 'tshechu'
- Visit the gravity-defying ‘Tiger's Nest’ Monastery in the Paro Valley
- Stay in the Phobjika Valley, winter home of the rare Black Necked Crane
- Includes both Thimphu and Thangbi Mani festivals

AT A GLANCE

- 10 days touring and sightseeing
- Max altitude - 3600 metres
- Join at Kathmandu

ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS

VIEW DATES, PRICES & BOOK YOUR HOLIDAY HERE

Introduction

This is the ultimate cultural journey through the Kingdom of Bhutan, crafted from KE's 30 years' experience of travelling in the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon'. The itinerary is designed to make sure you see all of the most iconic sights, from Paro as far east as Jakar and the Bumthang Valley. Timed to coincide with one of Bhutan's colourful festivals or 'tshechus', each of the itineraries is slightly different.

Travelling via Kathmandu, the adventure begins with a flight along the Himalaya to Paro. We then drive eastwards with a stop-off for sightseeing in Thimphu and a 2-day visit to Gantey in the Phobjika Valley, the overwinter home of the rare and endangered black-necked cranes. Moving on to Jakar at the heart of Bhutan, we'll spend time in the Bumthang valleys, famous for their unspoilt beauty and for a number of important monasteries. Here we will also enjoy an excursion to the remote Tang Valley, where we can witness an elaborate drum ceremony at the Pemachiling Nunnery. Leaving Bumthang, we make our way back towards the west on one of the world's most scenic roads. Crossing high passes bedecked with multicoloured prayer flags and in the company of grazing yaks, we can enjoy panoramic views of the snow-capped Himalaya. En route, we will stop overnight at Punakha where the impressive Punakha Dzong once served as the winter capital. Returning to Paro, we have included an archery demonstration and we will also stretch our legs with a walk up to the incredible cliff-hanging Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery, before flying back to Kathmandu.

Please note that the dates of Bhutanese festivals are tentative and can be changed at any time.

Use the 'Change Version' drop-down on the itinerary page for day-to-day information about each of the departures.

BOOK EARLY for BHUTAN! With only two airlines operating flights into Paro from Kathmandu, seats are limited and in high demand. Book early to guarantee your place on your chosen departure. We strongly advise booking a year in advance where possible.

Is this holiday for you?

Though this is principally a cultural touring holiday, some of the most extraordinary sights in Bhutan, like the Tigers' Nest monastery, can only be accessed on foot and therefore you will want to be in reasonable physical shape to get the most out of your holiday - this is the Himalaya after all! As this is a comprehensive tour of Bhutan's special places and iconic sights, there is by necessity some time spent on the road and you should be prepared for this. Our 2024 itineraries drive to and from the central district of Bumthang (and we added a day to allow this). Unpredictable flight schedules meant that we

could no longer include the outward journey to Bumthang by plane. Our drive back to Paro is carefully staged to maximise the time spent in each place we visit. During the road journeys there will be plenty of time to visit the key places of interest along the way, and to make the most of photo opportunities!

Itinerary

Version:

Holiday Information

What's Included

- A professional and qualified tour leader
- Bhutan visa fee
- Flights between Kathmandu and Paro
- All transfers and land transport involved in the itinerary
- All accommodation as described
- All meals
- FREE down jacket hire is available for this holiday on request

What's not Included

- Travel insurance
- Nepalese visa costs
- Tips for drivers and trek staff
- Miscellaneous expenses - beer and souvenirs etc

Joining Arrangements & Transfers

The holiday starts at the group hotel in Kathmandu.

Airport transfers are provided for all clients arriving Kathmandu on Day 1 and departing on the last day of the Land Only itinerary and all clients with additional nights booked through KE.

Hotel contact details and an emergency telephone number will be provided with your booking confirmation.

Meal Plan

All meals are included in the holiday price.

Special Diets

Whilst we can cater for vegetarians, albeit sometimes with a more limited choice, we cannot always provide for special diets. Due to the nature of some of the trips that we operate and the countries in which we operate them, it can be very hard (and sometimes impossible) to cater for a wide range of dietary choices and you may have to supplement your meals with food/snacks from home. If you have specific dietary requirements please do speak to our sales team and they will be able to advise you whether or not we will be able to offer your specific choice. Please note that we are unable to provide separate menus and cannot accept liability for any problems arising from special dietary requirements or intolerances.

Food & Water

Drinking Water

It is not recommended to drink untreated water from the taps. If you are on a trekking or cycling holiday, water is supplied to fill up your individual bottles. This will be boiled, filtered or provided in large jerry cans or 5 litre bottles. Additionally you should take purification tablets or a filter bottle (such as a Water-To-Go bottle) to treat your water when in towns or where water is not supplied. We do not encourage the purchasing of single use plastic bottles.

Typically the food in Bhutan is not very spicy, though the Bhutanese do themselves eat a lot of chillies both raw and cooked. Hotels throughout Bhutan generally offer a range of dishes including those designed for the western palette. All meals are included in the trip price.

Accommodation

This holiday includes 2 nights in Kathmandu, one en route to Bhutan and one on the return journey. In Kathmandu we use a comfortable, centrally located hotel.

In Bhutan, we use the best available standard of hotel and lodge accommodation at Paro, Thimphu, Jakar, Gantey and Punakha.

All rooms are en suite throughout. Accommodation is twin share. If you are travelling by yourself you will be paired up with another traveller of the same sex. Single rooms are available for a supplementary cost. If you are planning to extend your holiday, additional nights in Kathmandu are available on request.

Group Leader & Support Staff

The group will be met and escorted in Kathmandu by a local KE representative. Once in Bhutan the group will accompanied throughout by a professional and qualifed tour leader.

Altitude

This holiday involves going to moderately high altitude. During the course of your trip you will reach altitudes in excess of 2500 metres. Most people will have no difficulty with this level of altitude but before coming on the holiday, we recommend you read the advice on trekking at high altitude. You can also talk to one of our trekking experts if you have any concerns about altitude.

Spending Money

Approximately £150 - £200 should be allowed for miscellaneous expenses including drinks and the £40 - £50 you can expect top pay in tips to local staff. There are some quite interesting souvenirs to be bought in Kathmandu and in Bhutan. The Nepalese unit of currency is the Rupee and Bhutan's is the ngultrum which is tied to the value of the Indian rupee. It is not necessary to purchase Nepalese or Bhutanese currency before you travel. You will need very little Nepalese currency during your outward transit through Kathmandu and you can change a small amount at the airport or in your hotel for drinks etc.. You will be able to obtain your Bhutanese currency on arrival at the airport in Paro. Sterling and US dollars and are readily exchanged in Nepal and in Bhutan. Credit cards can be used to purchase many goods in Kathmandu and larger towns in Bhutan and are particularly useful for expensive souvenirs. It is possible to withdraw cash (rupees only) from cash machines Kathmandu using credit and debit cards.

Guidance on Tipping

Tipping is the accepted way of saying thank you for good service and the amount that you choose to contribute is up to you.

Although the appropriate level of tipping can vary with group size and the number of local staff, we suggest as a general guide that each group member contributes US$120 (in local currency).

Approximately $20 of this should go into a kitty for hotel porters and waiters (if you give this to your tour leader at the start of the tour, he or she will make sure it is distributed fairly).

The remainder should be divided between the staff (drivers, assistant guides etc...) at the end of the trek. Your Bhutanese tour leader will advise the group on an appropriate level of tipping for each crew member. Most groups will mark the end of their trip by handing out the tips with a bit of a ceremony on the last evening.

A tip for your main Bhutanese tour leader is not included in the above. As a group you may want to make a separate collection to tip your tour leader separately during dinner on your final evening in Bhutan.

Baggage Allowance

For this holiday you should take one piece of luggage and a daypack. It is possible to leave extra baggage at the hotel in Kathmandu and also in Paro. Checked baggage allowance for the flight from Kathmandu to Paro is 30kg. For other international flights please check your baggage allowance with your airline.

Group Size & Holiday Status

For each holiday there is a minimum number of participants required to enable it to go ahead. Once the minimum number is reached, the trip status will change from 'Available' to 'Guaranteed to run'. You can check the trip status for each departure in the 'Dates and Prices' table. Other than in exceptional circumstances, we will not cancel a trip once it has achieved this guaranteed to run status so you are free to proceed with your international flight booking and other travel arrangements.

General Information

Passport & Visas

The information that we provide is for UK passport holders.

A passport with 6 months remaining validity at the end of your stay is generally required**,** and you should have at least 2 blank pages for each country that you visit.

For other nationalities, please refer to your own Government website for the latest information.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct travel documents including vaccinations and health certificates *(see Health & Vaccinations below),* **and visas for your holiday.** Please ensure that you check the FCDO for the latest advice for **each country visited** before travel.

Visa Nepal

All nationalities require a visa. The visa process is partly automated and the fee is $30 for 15 days, $50 for 30 days, $125 for 90 days. The visa is FREE for children under 10 years. The visa allows multiple re-entry. Payment must be made in cash and USD, GBP or Euros are accepted.

Part of this on-arrival visa process involves filling in a 'Tourist Visa Application Form' and you can simplify the procedure at Kathmandu Airport by filling this form in online (**within 15 days of travelling**) at this link. This generates a receipt which you present (hard copy or saved on your phone) on arrival. This should allow you to go straight to the cashier to pay for your visa and has the potential to save you time in the visa queue.

Whilst these are not now needed for the visa process, we recommend that you travel with at least 2 spare passport photographs.

NEW REQUIREMENT - FNMIS - Foreign Nationals Management Information System

The Nepalese Department of Immigration has introduced this system which aims to assist in the tracking of foreign nationals when in Nepal. It is intended to streamline service delivery and to ensure the safety of travellers. It does not collect any additional personal data beyond that which is already obtained through existing immigration procedures.

You are required to download app before travelling. Use the app download links below:

• iOS: https://apps.apple.com/us/app/department-of-immigration/id6749536250

• Android: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.govnp.doi

Please Note: The system is not yet operating smoothly and if you have problems accessing the app or making it work, you can travel without it. You will be assisted to register on arrival in Nepal and your details can still be entered manually if necessary at hotel check-in, airport etc..

Visa Bhutan

All nationalities require a visa. KE will apply for the visa for you and the visa fee is included in your holiday cost.

Your individual visas will be issued to you in Kathmandu prior to your check-in for the flight to Paro in

Bhutan and your passport will be stamped on arrival in Paro.

To make the arrangements for your Bhutan Visa we need:

1). A clear and complete colour scan of the information page of your passport.

2). A colour scan of a recent passport style photo. Portrait orientation on a white background - with eyes open and forehead and ears clearly visible.

Please email these scans to us at the earliest opportunity.

Health & Vaccinations

Vaccinations:

You should be up to date with the routine vaccinations recommended in the UK for overseas travel.

You must also contact your doctor or travel clinic to check if there are specific vaccinations or other preventive measures that you need for the area you are visiting, in good time before you are due to depart.

Please ensure you are looking at the recommendations for all countries visited on your holiday plus recommendations for any borders you cross.

On holidays to more remote areas you should also have a dental check-up.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct travel documents including vaccinations and health certificates.

Please check the FCDO and Travel Health Pro. For all of your intended destinations for up-to-date advice.

Severe Allergies:

If you have a severe allergy please inform the KE office before you travel. We will do all we can to help, but we cannot guarantee an allergy free environment on KE trips.

Preparing for your Holiday

Getting some additional exercise before coming on an active holiday makes a lot of sense. The fitter you are, after all, the more enjoyable you will find the experience.

Climate

The best time to visit Bhutan is in the period before and after the Indian Monsoon which brings heavy rain to the foothills of Bhutan. The pre-monsoon months of March and April are the best for seeing the colourful blooms at lower altitudes, particularly the rhododendron. The post-monsoon months of October and November usually offer the clearest skies for views of the Himalaya. During both pre- and post- monsoon, the weather in Bhutan is normally bright and clear in the mornings with possible cloud building through the day. Day-time highs of around 20°C can be expected at altitudes around 2000 metres, whilst at the high points of the trip the maximum daytime temperature will be around 15°C. At night it can be quite chilly and in some places the temperature will drop to a few degrees above freezing.

Travel Aware

As a reputable tour operator, KE supports the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's **'Travel Aware'** campaign to enable British citizens to prepare for their journeys overseas. The 'Travel Aware' website provides a single, authoritative source of advice for all kinds of travellers and we recommend that before travel, all KE clients visit the official UK Government website at travelaware.campaign.gov.uk and read the FCDO Travel Advice for their chosen destination. All other nationalities should check their government websites for relevant information.

KE treat the safety and security of all clients as the most important aspect of any trip we organise. We would not run any trip that we did not consider reasonably safe. Should the FCDO advise against travel for any reason, we will contact everyone booked to travel to discuss the situation. We receive regular updates directly from the FCDO and are in constant touch with our contacts on the ground. If you have any questions about government travel advice, please call our office.

Single Use Plastic

KE do not encourage the use of single use plastic items. We are ensuring that our agents all over the world are working together to reduce the problem and educate those around them. We are leading by example in our KE office by reducing our plastic use.

Books

- Bhutan. (Odyssey Illustrated Guide). Pommaret.
- Bhutan. (Lonely Planet Guide).
- Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon. Edmunds.

Maps

Bhutan Himalaya. 1:390,000. Nepa Maps (Himalayan Maphouse)

This map gives a general overview of Bhutan. Relief is indicated by shading and selected altitudes of peaks and passes. Highways, main roads , minor roads, and trekking routes are marked. Symbols denote post offices, dzongs, monuments, places of interest etc. The map is indexed for place names, dzongs, passes and peaks. Inside the map cover are printed some geographical notes on the country and driving or walking times between selected locations.

Private Groups Information

Make this KE Adventure holiday your own!

- Do our normal group departure dates not fit?
- Would you prefer to travel with just friends and/or family?
- Are you looking to organise a trip for your local walking, biking or mountaineering club?

It's really easy to make a trip your own. Simply select from our full range of adventure holidays and choose the dates that work for you and your group.

We are experts in creating holidays for groups of friends, families, charities and clubs. Our personal service means you'll be fully involved as we make the arrangements for your perfect adventure holiday.

Independence with Security

Travelling as a KE Private Group allows you more flexibility and choice, but still with the peace of mind that everything is pre-planned and arranged for your group by a reputable adventure travel company.

To take your first step to an amazing adventure with your friends and family complete the private group enquiry form, or call our **Sales Experts on: 017687 73966**

Travel Insurance

It is an essential condition of joining a holiday with KE Adventure Travel that you have a valid travel insurance policy to cover the cost of medical treatment and to protect the value of your holiday in the event of cancellation. When taking out insurance please ensure the policy you choose covers you for the activities and altitude included in your itinerary.

For appropriate insurance cover we recommend Campbell Irvine Direct. Please go to our Travel Insurance page for further information and to get a quote.

Equipment Information

BDT Equipment List

Please try to keep the weight of your baggage to a minimum. See the ‘baggage allowance’ section for further details.

You should bring the following items:

- Comfortable walking shoes
- Trousers
- T-shirts and casual shirts
- Fleece jacket or warm jumper
- Waterproof jacket
- Warm jacket (down)*
- Sunhat
- Sunglasses
- Headlamp or torch
- Sun protection (including total bloc for lips, nose etc.)
- Water bottle
- Water purification tablets
- Washbag and toiletries
- Antibacterial handwash
- Small daypack 20 litres

- Basic First Aid Kit including; antiseptic cream, throat lozenges, diarrhoea treatment (Imodium) painkillers, plasters and blister treatment, and re-hydration salts (Dioralite).

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ARE OPTIONAL:

- Shorts
- Scarf or buff
- Swimwear (for hotel pool)
- Travel clothes
- Camera
- Repair kit - (eg. needle, thread, duct tape)
- Reusable cloth bag for shopping (to avoid plastic bags)

Notes

*FREE down jacket hire is included in your KE holiday booking upon request.

Please make all requests at least 6 weeks prior to the trip departure date. Note all hire / rental equipment is issues in Bhutan. Please remember to allow room in your luggage for these items.

FESTIVAL DRESS CODE

The Bhutanese always come dressed in their finest clothing for a festival and so you may want to bring a smarter set of clothes with you to use on the days you are attending the festivals. Long sleeves and long trousers are best, women might want to bring a scarf. Dirty boots or open toed sandals should be avoided where possible. Hats and umbrellas should be avoided.

FESTIVAL ETIQUETTE

Bhutan's Tshechus (festivals) are religious events and the festival grounds are purified and consecrated by lamas. The dancers are in a state of meditation, they believe that they transform themselves into the deities they represent on the dance ground, generating a spiritual power, which purifies, enlightens and blesses the spectators. Out of respect, whilst watching the dances, you should not eat, drink, talk or laugh loudly at inappropriate times. You should not use flash photography and please be respectful when photographing dancers or onlookers. The festivals are not tourist attractions, they are manifestations of religious traditions thousands of year's old, which we are fortunate to be able to

witness.

Land Only Information

Please refer to the 'Joining Arrangements & Transfers' within Holiday Information for further details.

Flights and other transport to your destination should not be booked until you have received your booking confirmation and the departure is showing 'Guaranteed to Run' or 'Limited'.

Land Only Information

The LAND ONLY dates and prices are for joining at the hotel in Kathmandu. Transfers from Tribhuvan International (Kathmandu) Airport to/from the group hotel are provided on the first and last day of the holiday.

Flight Inclusive Information

Limited seats are available at the advertised flight price, please book as early as you can. If we are unable to secure seats at the price shown, or you have requested regional departures and/or upgrades, we will provide you with an alternative quote. It is likely that flight payment will be in advance of your final holiday balance. Booking a flight inclusive package means you will benefit from full financial protection, eases your holiday planning, and leaves us to deal with airlines and schedule changes. If you book flights through KE Adventure Travel we will offset the carbon of your flight.

Regional departures and/or alternative carriers are available on request.

Flight Inclusive Information

The FLIGHT INCLUSIVE dates and prices are based on UK flights from London to Kathmandu. Outbound flights will usually depart from the UK in the evening, arriving mid afternoon the following day (day 1 of the itinerary). Return flights will depart Kathmandu usually in the morning of the last day of the itinerary, arriving in the UK later the same day.

Why Choose KE

BDT Why KE

Your Bhutan visa fees, all meals, and return flights from Kathmandu to Paro are included, and there's even FREE down jacket hire available too.

Please Note This document was downloaded on 11/11/2026 and the trip is subject to change