

ARA BHUTAN TOURS

MOST POPULAR TOURIST CIRCUIT IN BHUTAN – WESTERN &

CENTRAL BHUTAN

Western Bhutan is the most visited destination in Bhutan, not only is it the most accessible to tourists flying into the international airport in Paro, it is also the capital and the seat of the crown and government and center for most international organizations and offices. Similarly there is no dearth of quality eateries and restaurants, museums, wellness facilities to experience modern comforts. Western Bhutan may be brimming with locals and expats alike, in bustling towns with cosmopolitan citizens and facilities, but it is still steeped in Bhutanese culture ubiquitous in the architecture, infrastructure, traditional costumes and not least of all the absence of traffic lights and presence of lone traffic police in colorful structures to control and guide the traffic serves to prove that Bhutan is still a place which hasn't slipped into the homogeneity of modernization. Untouched forests and natural landscapes are on the fringes of the towns and interspersed with settlements inside the busiest areas.

THIMPHU

The capital city is a small valley situated at an altitude of just over 2000 meters over sea level, there is an abundance of restaurants, bars, clubs and coffee haunts equipped with wifi connection

THIMPHU HIGHLIGHTS

1. Trashichoe Dzong
2. Folk Heritage Museum
3. Zorig Chusom School
4. Royal Textile Museum
5. Sangaygang
6. Chari Goempa
7. Tango Goempa
8. Farmers Market
9. Thimphu Tsechu

and an increasingly large number of premier hotels setting up shop in this picturesque valley. Residence to the Royal Family and the Parliament it is both a contemporary and cultural hub to experience Bhutanese cultural heritage with modern trappings. There are many sights and things to do in Thimphu, from wandering the streets and main square to visiting the *Folk Heritage Museum*, a treasure trove of historical artifacts and insights into the rural farm lifestyle of Bhutanese in the foregone era. The *Zorig Chusom School of Thirteen Traditional Arts* is also a regular stop for tourists, as well as the *Royal Textile Museum* to witness the rich heritage of Bhutanese weaving. The national animal the Takin, a rare species of the Bovine family only found in mountainous terrain, can be seen at the Takin enclave in *Sangaygang*, a popular hillock for recreational activities which also offers stunning panoramic views of the Thimphu valley. From *Sangaygang* several hikes can be undertaken to visit nearby Temples. Other refreshing climbs include the historically significant *Tango Goemba* and *Charig Gomba*, an hour long ascend through whispering pine forests. The Sunday farmers market and lines of

souvenir kiosks offers many gastronomical treats and mementos to taken home. The powerful *Trashichoe Dzong* the seat of the King and Parliament is a veritable fortress, the white washed walls gleaming in the sunlight or sparkling in the evenings provide spectacular photographs and wonderment for visitors.

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PARO

PARO HIGHLIGHTS

Taksang Monastery

Paro Town

Paro Dzong

Drugyel Dzong

Taa Dzong

Paro Tsechu

Paro is roughly an hours drive from Thimphu, it is one of the widest valleys in Bhutan and is also one of the richest, rice plantation is prevalent and so are traditional farm houses on the landscape. It is also the location of the only international airport in Bhutan. Paro town is a juxtaposition of the old and new with plenty of bakeries, restaurants and posh hotels, it provides conventional convenience with indelible influences of Buddhist heritage and culture. Paro has over 155 temples, some of the oldest temples are found here built by the founding Buddhist masters. The most iconic Bhutanese symbol the *Taksang* Monastery is built on a rock face of 800 meters above the ground, built on sacred grounds where Guru *Padhmasambava*, the propagator of Buddhism in the land, he flew to the present day *Taksang* Monastery on the back of a tiger and meditated there. Many popular treks originate in Paro, the picturesque Druk Path trek

passes through Paro and the *Jhomolhari* Trek, also starts in Paro from the base of the *Jhomolhari* mountain peak, similar excursions to the Paro *Dzong* to see the impressive fortress and Paro Tsechu will leave you completely content with the aesthetics and appearances of the charming valley. A crystal clear river fed by the Himalayan glaciers meanders across the valley and augments the beauty of Paro valley. Water sports like rafting and kayaking are enjoyed by adventure enthusiasts. The *Taa* Dzong and erstwhile ancient watchtower now converted into a museum is an informative and productive lesson in Bhutans history and culture. The remnants of the Drugyel Dzong is an ideal setting for a picnic or solitude. The atmosphere drums up a romantic and contemplative mood. Paro town with its numerous farm houses are also very popular for arranging farm stays and local meals prepared with endemic flavors and products.

PUNAKHA

Punakha is historically significant as it is associated with many important events in Bhutans history, the coronation of the first King was held in Punakha, and most recently the Royal Wedding took place at the Punakha Dzong in 2012. it is also the Dzong where the remains of *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal* are preserved, the father of Bhutan, he is attributed for creating

Highlights

Punakha Dzong

Khamsa Yulley Chorten

Sangchen Dorji Lhendrup Nunnery

Punakha Tsechu

Bhutans unique cultural identity which has allowed us to thrive today in the present. It is also home of the *Ranjung Kharsapani* an extremely sacred Buddhist relic, which is the self created image of *Avalokiteswara* that miraculously emerged from the vertebrae of *Tsangpa Gyarey* the founder of the Drukpa School when he was cremated. Punakha also served as the capital in the past, and now is the winter abode of the *Je Khenpo* the Chief Abbot and the monk body. At an altitude of 1200 meters above sea level, the valley enjoy hot summers and cool winters, the extremely fertile

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land makes it easy to grow rice and other cash crops for domestic and export consumption. The Punakha Dzong is built at the confluence of the *Mochhu* and the *Phochhu* two important rivers, camping and adventure sports has found a special niche in this valley. The Punakha *Dubchoen* and Tsechu are also important festivals where the community gathers to view elaborate mask dances and performances commemorating victories of Bhutanese armies over invading Tibetan soldiers trying to take the *Ranjung Kharsapani* from the Punakha Dzong. There are several places of interest in Punakha, including the *Khamsa Yulley Chorten*, built by The Queen Mother for the reigning 5th King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the *Sangchen Dorji Lhendrup Nunnery* which is perched on a hillock on the junction of the two rivers. Punakha is located about two and a half hours driving time from the capital Thimphu.

WANGDUEPHODRANG

It is the biggest district in Bhutan and home to the elusive and endangered Black Neck Crane which migrates over from Tibet during the fall and winter months. It has a varied climate and flora and fauna due to its diverse altitude which spans from 800 meters to 5800 meters above sea level. The district is fringed with subtropical forests in the south and snowy peaks in the north. The Black Neck Crane festival and three day Wangduephodrang Tsechu is attended by many tourists and locals alike. Other places of interest include Gangtay Monastery and *Dargay Goempa*. The *Phobjikha* site in Wangduephodrang is the most famous as it is the valley where the Black Neck Crane resides during the winter months. Other exotic animals found in this district include Red Pandas, Tigers and Leopards. There are also large numbers of rare birds such as the Black Necked Crane, White-Bellied Heron and the Spotted Eagle.

Highlights

Phobjikha Valley

Black Neck Crane Festival

Gangtay Monastery

Dargay Goempa

CENTRAL BHUTAN

Highlights

Kurjey Lhakang

Jambay Lhakang

Mebartsho

Jakar Dzong

BUMTHANG

Bumthang is one of the prettiest places in Bhutan, it is also the most religious and spiritual place in Bhutan, the legacy of *Guru Padhmasambava* and the Famous Tertoen or Treasure discoverer can still be felt and seen in this valley. The oldest temple built by King *Songsten Gyalpo* in 659 AD, the Jambay Lhakang was built as part of an initiative of building 108 temples in the Himalayas to subdue a powerful demon in the region. Similarly most of the temples are closely associated with *Guru Padhmasambava*

and his undertakings to disseminate the teachings of Buddha in Bhutan. Bumthang Valley

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comprises of four valleys Ura, Tang, Choekkor and Chummey, they are broad and scenic valleys carved from the ancient glaciers. Bumthang is endowed with fertile lands which are strewn with rice, buckwheat and potato fields. The most important temple is the *Kurjey Lhakang* which is built in the cave where Guru *Padhmasambava* imprint is found, this temple is a vital part of the religious legend which shrouds Bumthang valley. It is also famous for the *Mebartsho* or the burning lake where *Teroten Pema Lingpa* retrieved sacred treasures from the Lake. Large environment of this district are part of biological corridors and national parks, such as the *Wangchuck Centennial Park* and the *Thrumshingla Park*. With its idyllic and romantic surroundings Bumthang is perfect for excursions and hikes. The Jambay Lhakang Festival and the *Jakar Dzong* are important tourist stops.