

Journeys of the Spirit — discover your inner essence —

Bhutan

26 April – 9 May 2018

Imagine a kingdom where happiness is paramount, where culture and tradition remain intact and where Buddhism has predominated since the 7th century. This country is Bhutan, the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon'. Step inside a mystical kingdom floating high amongst the clouds in the Himalayas, a place often romantically referred to as the Last Shangri-la.

This journey takes you on a magical journey across the western provinces and gently weaves through the central Bumthang region of the Drukpa people to follow the trail of Guru Rinpoche, or Padmasambhava, the revered saint who brought Buddhism to Bhutan.

As we head east we will journey alongside the rushing rivers that snake through the valleys of Paro, Thimphu and Wangdue. There is plenty of time to rest and explore in the local villages and mingle with the people that live there. Discover fertile rice paddies, verdant valleys, lush forests, magnificent mountains and pristine rivers that comprise this magical land.

We will venture to central Bhutan region with an opportunity to explore the remote and ancient monasteries and temples. We will have the chance to meet and chat to monks and the caretakers of these precious sites and make offerings to local deities.

On returning to the Western provinces we will also explore the Punakha Dzong, the winter residence of the Je Khempo, who is the head of the Bhutanese monk body.

Before leaving Bhutan we take a day hike to the famous Tiger's Nest Monastery, perched high on a cliff above Paro Valley, to hang prayer flags, to seek blessings and to be present to one of the most extraordinary energetic sites on our planet.





Day 1 Thursday 26 April Arrival in Bhutan

Fly into Paro and experience breathtaking views of the Himalayan peaks as you descend into this remote land. On arrival in Paro we will be met by Nidup our local Bhutanese guide and one of the most experienced in the country. After a cup of tea to take in the sights and sounds of Paro, we will journey to the 8th Century Kichu Lhakang one of the oldest and most beautiful temples in Bhutan. It is very special Lhakang to visit first on our journey. You can circumambulate the building and spin the numerous prayer wheels around the building. After lunch in Paro you will drive to settle into your hotel.

**Overnight in Hotel Jumolhari, Thimphu
Meals – Lunch and Dinner**

Day 2 Friday 27 April Tango Monastery

In the morning you will head toward Thimphu and skirt the city to head toward Tango Monastery. Walk through beautiful forest and on the way up stop to hang your own prayer flags, sending out a special prayer for whatever you wish! At the top, tour this working monastery and get an insiders view to a day in the life of a Bhutanese monk. If in residence on the day, there may be an opportunity for those interested to seek a private audience with a Trulku or High Lama and receive a blessing!

**Overnight in Hotel Jumolhari, Thimphu
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner**

Day 3 Saturday 28 April Thimphu

After breakfast, you will spend time experiencing local attractions, wander through bookshops and handicraft boutiques and get a feel for the city. Attractions include the Textile Museum featuring masterpieces and exquisite hand painted Thangkhas from the Royal family of Bhutan; the papermaking factory; and the Traditional Medicines Hospital, an indigenous hospital specializing in Tibetan herbal medicine.

**Overnight in Hotel Jumolhari, Thimphu
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner**

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Day 4

Sunday 29 April

Onwards to Punakha

Depart Thimphu and cross Dochu-la Pass at 3,140 meters and on a clear day enjoy a spectacular view of the Eastern Himalayan mountain range. You will visit the 108 Chortens which were built recently by the 4th King's first wife. It is a truly serene place. Spend time at the recently built Lhakang and light a butter lamp for world peace. Travel by vehicle beside the remarkable Wangdue River and be mesmerized by the glorious light blue glacial water as it reflects off the soft white sands along the shoreline. The colour of the water is amazing and is proof alone that it is one of the cleanest rivers in the world. Arrive into the spectacular spiritual capital town of Punakha.



Overnight at Zhingkhams Resort, Punakha
Meals – Breakfast, lunch and Dinner

Day 5

Monday 30 April

Punakha Dzong

Visit the breathtaking Punakha Dzong (meaning fortress). Punakha is the ancient capital of Bhutan and the winter residence of the Head Abbott or chief monk of Bhutan. The Dzong lies between two rushing rivers, the Mochu and Pochu or male and female rivers and was built in 1637 AD. It is one of the most dramatic looking buildings in Bhutan. Spend the afternoon resting and relaxing at your lovely hotel.



Overnight at Zhingkhams Resort, Punakha
Meals – Breakfast, lunch and Dinner



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Day 6 Tuesday 1 May Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten



In the morning you will take a lovely walk to the Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten built in 1999 to protect the country and to spiritually support the reign of the 5th King of Bhutan. It will be a stunning walk through paddy fields, alongside a babbling brook and up a hillock to reach the Chorten. Inside the Chorten the walls are adorned with beautiful iconography of the Nyingmapa Buddhist tradition. In the afternoon, spend some time resting and relaxing at your hotel.

**Overnight in Zhingkhams Resort, Punakha
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner**

Day 7 Wednesday 2 May Travelling eastward to Bumthang



Today is a big travelling day in our vehicle as we head eastward to Bumthang. We make a major stop in the Trongsa – the first capital of Bhutan. You will visit the Trongsa Dzong (or watchtower) which hosts one of the finest museums in Bhutan. It is an exquisite showcase of the history and spiritual significance of Bhutan. There will be plenty of rest stops to capture the stunning scenery and opportunities to mix with locals along the way. Dine on food unique to the Central Bhutan region and sample the local ara (rice wine). Enjoy an evening of local hospitality.

**Overnight in Miphams Guest House, Bumthang
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner**

Day 8 Thursday 3 May Visit Ura Valley

Bumthang is the cultural and spiritual centre of Bhutan, so here is where we can rest and soak up some of the true essence of Bhutanese religious culture. Today you will visit the quaint Ura village in one of the most picturesque valleys in Bumthang. Often considered Switzerland within Bhutan, we will visit some of our friends whom we have connected with on our past journeys. Along the way to Ura we will visit the sacred Membar Tso or 'Burning Lake' a significant spiritual experience where according to Buddhist belief, the famous Pema Lingpa, the revered treasure seeker, found ancient treasures and teachings hidden by Guru Rinpoche.

**Overnight in Miphams Guest House, Bumthang
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner**



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Day 9 Friday 4 May

Sacred sites of Guru Rinpoche

Today we will explore another aspect of the Bumthang region and hear stories about the famous Guru Rinpoche, the revered saint who brought Buddhism to Bhutan. Today we walk to the three most auspicious temples that were significant to Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche). One of them is Jambay Lhakang, which was built on the same day as 108 other Lhakangs throughout Tibet and Bhutan and was restored by both Guru Rinpoche and Bhutan's first King, making it one of Bhutan's most sacred temples. Our walk takes us through tiny villages, farmlands and we enjoy meeting monks and locals along the way



Overnight in Mipham Guest House, Bumthang
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Saturday 5 May

Travel to Punakha

Our time travelling to Punakha is under the directive of our great guide Nidup. There may be a festival to experience, or a visit to the Royal Palace for the flag changing ceremony. Whatever you experience here is very special.

Overnight in Zhingkhams Resort, Punakha
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Sunday 6 May

Paro



Spend these few days in Paro exploring the lovely Western Paro valley. We have many options for when we are in this region, so be open to surprises!

We will visit the Paro Dzong and also the opportunity to leisurely watch the villagers play an archery game at the central Paro archery grounds. Archery is the National

sport in Bhutan.

Overnight in Hotel Gangtey Palace, Paro
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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Day 12 Monday 7 May

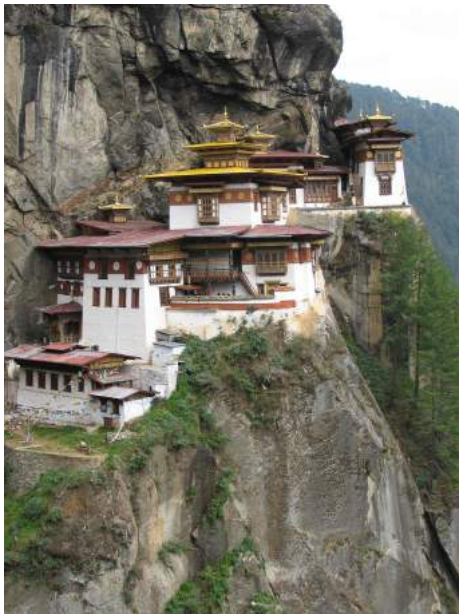
Paro

Maybe a gentle walk today in the forest surrounding the Talkin sanctuary. The talkin is a unique animal only found in Bhutan and legend has it it is a combination of a cow and a goat....but I will leave that to Nidup to explain. There are many hidden surprises with Bhutan and I wouldn't want to share them all before you get there!

**Overnight in Hotel Gangtey Palace, Paro
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner**

Day 13 Tuesday 8 May

Hike to Taktsang



On your second last day in Bhutan, our piece de resistance is a walk up to Tigers Nest Monastery – a immersion of the senses you will never forget! Taktsang Monastery is the most famous monastery in Bhutan and is perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro Valley. In Buddhism it is said that Guru Rinpoche flew here on the back of a tigress, and meditated at this place and so the monastery is called “Tiger's Nest” (Taktsang). It is a sacred place of pilgrimage which Bhutanese people try to visit at least once in their lifetime. Rise early like the monks to visit this spectacular monastery before anyone else arrives. Spend the afternoon resting at the hotel or perhaps a Hot Stone Bath to

rejuvenate your walking legs, or just absorbing your last few hours in Bhutan in the beautiful grounds of our Palace.

**Overnight in Hotel Gangtey Palace, Paro
Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner**



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Day 14 Wednesday 9 May

Depart Bhutan

Maybe you can have a morning walk before breakfast, or just spend some peaceful time in meditation with views of the valley. Our flight leaves for Bangkok mid morning.

Meals – Breakfast



Important Note:

Whilst every effort is made to adhere to this itinerary, please keep in mind that this is adventure travel in a remote Himalayan kingdom. There may be changes to this itinerary - from the hotels we use, to the places we visit & due to circumstances outside our control like weather conditions, road conditions and last minute changes to government policy.

Journeys of the Spirit will do everything possible to ensure a memorable and exciting trip for you whatever situation presents itself, however it is highly recommended to take your lead from the locals and let go and let the magic of Bhutan take over...

We thank you in advance for your flexibility and your open mind.

Journeys of the Spirit Pty Ltd

Phone / sms / Viber / WhatsApp:

In Australia: 042 77 66 716 International: +61 42 77 66 716

Email: spirit@iinet.net.au Skype: [julie.baker.journeys](https://www.skype.com/people/julie.baker.journeys)

Website: www.journeysofthespirit.com.au

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ABN: 74 611 094 430