

A Kingdom in the Clouds (5 Days tour)

Day 01: Arrive Paro (altitude 2200 meters)



Fly into the inner Himalayas with Drukair, the national carrier. The green wall of hills known as *duars*—the gateways into Bhutan from the plains of India gradually rise higher as the plane flies north. Pallid rivers rush along the valleys, waterfalls plunge down forested mountainsides and, to the north, the great snowcapped peaks of the inner Himalayas rise up to the heavens. Farmhouses dot the hillsides on either side of the plane.

As the aircraft descends to the Paro valley, you will see Paro *Dzong* (fortress) on the hillside overlooking the Paro *Chu* (river), with *Ta Dzong*, formerly a watchtower and now the National Museum, above it. Your Far East Himalaya representative, will be waiting for you at the Paro airport. After completion of airport formalities, there will be a refreshing drive for about 1.5 hours towards Thimphu, the modern capital town of Bhutan. On arrival to Thimphu, check into the hotel. Today's tour program depends on your arrival time in Thimphu.

Evening free after dinner. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu

Day 02: Thimphu sightseeing/visits and Thimphu (altitude 2350 meters) – Punakha (altitude 1310 meters); 70 km [2.5 hours]



Thimphu, perhaps the most unusual capital city in the world, is the seat of government. This bustling town is home to Bhutan's royal family, the civil service, and foreign missions with representation in Bhutan. It is also the headquarters for a number of internationally funded development projects.

In the morning visit to *Tashichho Dzong* (fortress), the main secretariat building which houses the throne room of His Majesty, the King. *Tashichho Dzong* is also the summer residence of the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot) and the central monk body. Proceed to the National Library, which houses an extensive collection of Buddhist literature, with some works dating back several hundred years. The National Library in the neighborhood houses a huge book, called "*Giant visual odyssey through the Kingdom of Bhutan*", and was made by scientist Michael Hawley and is one of the eleven models available worldwide. It has a height of 1.52 meters and a length of 2.13 meters and weighs about 60 kilograms. In its 112 pages, the book offers stunning and high quality images of the Last Himalayan Kingdom, taken on four trips through Bhutan. The entire book requires 1 gallon of ink and 1 day to be printed. Visit the nearby Institute for *Zorig Chusum* (commonly known as the Painting School), where a six-year training course is given in the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Also visit (outside only) the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, where the medicinal herbs abundant in the kingdom are compounded and dispensed.



After lunch, visit the National Memorial *Chorten* (stupa). The building of this landmark was originally envisaged by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who had wanted to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it is both a memorial to the Late King ("the father of modern Bhutan"), and a monument to peace. Visit the government-run Handicrafts Emporium and privately owned crafts shops, which offer a wide range of handcrafted products, including the



splendid *thangka* paintings and exquisitely woven textiles for which Bhutan is famous. Also visit the Folk Heritage and National Textile Museums.

In the early evening drive to Punakha and on the way you will cross over *Dochu-La* pass (3,088m/10,130ft) and see good view of the Eastern Himalayan peaks, if the weather is clear.

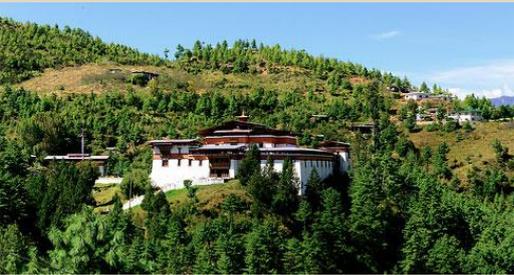
Overnight halt at the hotel in Punakha.

Day 03: Punakha sightseeing/visits and Punakha – Paro



Punakha served as the capital of Bhutan until 1955, when the seat of government moved to Thimphu. Originally situated on the riverbank and dominated by the towering walls of Punakha *Dzong*, the township was relocated to a safer site a few kilometers down the valley, consequent upon extensive flooding in the early 1990s. At the same time, extensive renovation work was undertaken on Punakha *Dzong* itself, which is now a breathtaking and glorious sight as you first glimpse it from the road. Although four catastrophic fires and an earthquake in past times destroyed many historic documents, Punakha *Dzong* still houses many sacred and historic

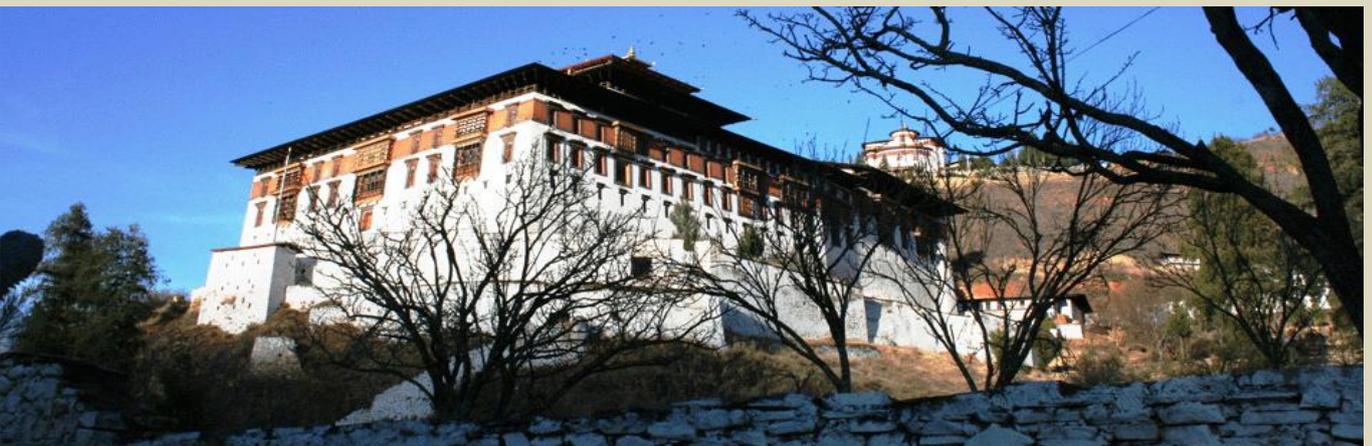
artifacts and also the embalmed body of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Visit Chimi Lhakhang, the fertility temple of the divine madman-Lama Drukpa Kuenley.



After lunch drive to Paro, visiting Semtokha *Dzong* en route. This *dzong*, built in 1627, is the oldest in Bhutan. It now houses the Institute for Language and Cultural Studies.

Arrive Paro and check into the hotel. Overnight at the hotel in Paro.

Day 04: Paro sightseeing/visits



The valley of Paro contains a wealth of attractions. In the morning, visit *Ta Dzong*. Once a watchtower, built to defend *Rinpung Dzong* during inter-valley wars of the 17th century, *Ta Dzong* was inaugurated as Bhutan's National Museum in 1968. Afterwards, walk down a hillside trail to visit *Rinpung Dzong*, which has a long and fascinating history.

After lunch, drive up along the valley to view the ruins of Drukgyel *Dzong*, 18 km. from Paro town on the north side of the valley. It was from here that the Bhutanese repelled several invading Tibetan armies during the 17th century. Also visit Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the oldest and one of the most sacred shrines of the kingdom built in the 7th century A.D.



In the evening, visit a traditional farmhouse for an opportunity to interact with a local family and learn something of their lifestyle. Later on, take an evening stroll along the main street, and perhaps visit a few handicrafts shops, or take refreshments at a local café or bar.

Overnight at the hotel in Paro. Farewell dinner with your trip host.

Day 05: Depart Paro

After early breakfast at the hotel, drive to the airport for flight to your onward destination. Your Far East Himalaya representative will help you with the exit formalities and then bid you farewell.