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Escorted by
Tara Gupta, CTIE
President

MEMBER
NSA
NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION



Bhutan – Land of the Thunder Dragon

A Discovery Journey for the Curious Traveler

Accompany Tara Gupta, President India by Design

(Limited to 10 guests)

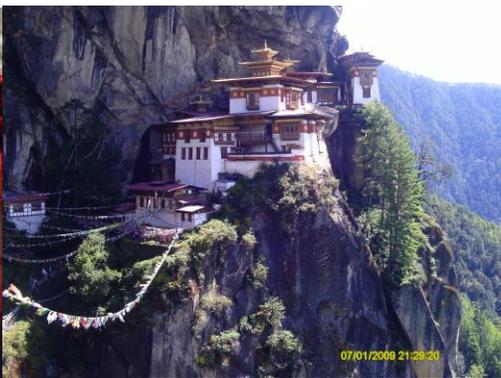
Day by Day Itinerary – 12 Nights

Journey begins in New Delhi, India – Thursday, 7th March 2013

Journey Ends in New Delhi, India – Tuesday, 19th March 2013

For an extended vacation, combine this journey with a visit to India, Nepal or Thailand.

On a Journey with Tara, the Possibilities are Endless & the Discoveries Magical!



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Bhutan - The Land of the Thunder Dragon

The Kingdom of Bhutan is one of the world's little known treasures. Here in the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon,' quality of life is measured in terms of Gross National Happiness, rather than purely material measures - though Bhutanese live comfortable, serene lives. This spiritual land is the last bastion of the Vajrayana school of Mahayana Buddhism which provides the essence of a unique identity for the 700,000 people. Until quite recently this tiny country remained in splendid isolation, dedicated to preserving its deep Buddhist traditions and pristine landscapes. Now, guests are invited to discover Bhutan's natural and cultural wonders. A unique blend of the old and new, Bhutan is a country that is slowly opening up to the modern world in a fine balance with its ancient traditions.

Those fortunate enough to visit Bhutan describe it as a unique, deeply spiritual and mystical experience. This kingdom is an adventure like no other. Join me on this amazing journey among ancient monasteries and temples, Himalayan peaks and glacial rivers, rare wildlife and extraordinary people. I guarantee that your journey will be filled with memories for a lifetime.

Day 1 – Arrive New Delhi – Thursday, 7th March 2013:

When you arrive in New Delhi, we will gladly provide a private transfer from IGI airport to your hotel. (nominal charge).

Day at leisure to recover from jet lag or to explore the several **“Insiders’ Experience”** with Tara. Explore the many museums of Delhi; attend Mass at a local Catholic or Protestant Church: or a worship ceremony at a temple, gurudwara or monastery; shop for beautiful cottons and silks and get your clothes custom tailored by Tara’s Tailor Master for over 25 years. Or simply relax at an Ayurvedic Spa or dine at the several gourmet restaurants of Delhi. Whether you want to eat where the locals eat or want fine dining with gourmet cuisine, you have several choices – including delicious vegetarian street food (Chaat) of Northern India, authentic South Indian meal or perhaps you want to chat with students over dinner in their college dining room.

Meals: None **Hotel:** The Lalit or Radisson Blu



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Days 2 & 3 – Thimpu, Bhutan – Friday and Saturday , 8th & 9th March 2013:

Our early morning flight from New Delhi to Paro, Bhutan provides spectacular views of the Bhutanese landscape as we approach the airport in the Paro Valley. The valley is a green bowl surrounded by jagged Himalayan Mountains and forested hillsides, crossed by beautiful rivers, and dotted with medieval fortresses. The first thing we notice as we disembark in Bhutan is the absence of noise and a feeling of peacefulness that is rare in most other Asian cities. Having kept its bucolic nature, the Paro Valley is one of the most scenic valleys in Bhutan. The houses are considered to be among the most beautiful in the country, and Paro is believed to be one of the first valleys to have received the imprint of Buddhism.

We are greeted with a warm Bhutanese reception and transferred to our hotel in Thimpu, about an hour's drive from Paro. Thimpu, is the capital city and home to Bhutan's royal family, the Wangchuks. Before becoming Bhutan's official national capitol in 1961, Thimpu was simply a rural farming valley. Small and secluded, Thimpu is unlike any other world capital. The city is quiet and there are only a few streets, no traffic lights and no traffic problems common to other Asian capitals.

In Thimpu we browse the Centenary Farmer's Market, the Textile Museum, National Memorial Stupa (chorten), Changangkha Temple, Takin and Craft Bazaar, local school for the disabled (<http://www.draktsho-bhutan.org/>).

We visit Trashichhodzong, the seat of Bhutan's government since 1952. Currently it houses the throne room and offices of the king, the secretariat and the ministries of home affairs and finance. The original dzong was built in 1641 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel and later expanded by different rulers. Having been damaged by earthquakes and fire it was rebuilt to its present structure without a written plan nor the use of a single nail. The most sacred national asset and abiding image of the country, Trashichho Dzong, is the seat of the central monastic body of Bhutan and summer residence of Je Khenpo.

We hike to the Tango Monastery. Our walk begins from the small village of Dodena. Our trail starts by crossing a covered bridge over the Wang Chhu and we climb steadily to Cheri Goemba, a small monastery perched on the hill with a view over the Thimpu Valley. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal built this monastery in 1620, and this is where the first community of monks in Bhutan was established. The monastery is considered very sacred as it contains the ashes of Tempi Nima, the father of the first Shabdrung of Bhutan, and beautiful frescoes of Buddhist saints. We descend back the way we came, keeping our eyes open for the goral (wild goat) that are often spotted on the cliffs nearby. Back at the village of Dodena we follow a riverside trail via Begana to Cabesa, home to the Choki School of Arts.



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The Choki School is private and provides free skills-related education in the traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan to Bhutanese children who are unable to attend or complete their formal education. After visiting the school we continue along the riverside trail passing through rural villages before returning to Thimphu.

Meals: Lunch & Dinner

Hotel: Taj Tashi

Days 4 & 5 - Punakha – Sun. & Mon. – 10th & 11th March 2013 (3 hours)

After a leisurely breakfast, we drive to Punakha crossing the Dochula Pass (10,230 ft), which offers a great view of the eastern Himalayan Mountains especially on clear winter days. From the pass our road descends through magnificent pine and rhododendron forests and wanders through some of the most picturesque countryside in Bhutan. The beauty of this place is further enhanced by the Druk Wangyel Chortens a 108 stupas built for the well-being of all sentient beings by the eldest queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.

Punakha, at altitude of 4420 feet served as the capital of Bhutan till 1955. It is the winter seat of the Je Khenpo (Chief abbot) and the monk body. With its temperate climate, this rich fertile valley is fed by the Phochu (male) and Mochu (female) rivers. Here we will visit the **Punakha Dzong** built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel in 1637 as it stands majestically at the junction of the two rivers. We will also go on a leisurely hike to **Khamsum Yuelley** stupa through the paddy fields and rivers against a beautiful scenic backdrop. Built by the 5th King's mother, this stupa is a splendid example of Bhutanese architecture and art and is the only one of its kind in the world. The **Talo Village** and the famous **Chhimi Lhakhang** founded by the famous Lama Drukpa Kinley are also short walk through the village and paddy fields as is the newly found Nunney located on top of a hill with incredible view of Bhutanese countryside.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Hotel: Meriphunsum – www.meripunsumresort.co

Day 6 & 7 - Bumthang – Tues. & Wed. 12th and 13th March 2013 (210 kms/6-7 Hrs)

Our road from Punakha to the east, to the district of Bumthang, is an incredible feat of engineering which follows Himalayan ridges and valleys towards the cultural heartland of Bhutan. A winding and twisting route via the Pele La brings us to Trongsa, the ancestral home of Bhutan's current royal dynasty, the Wangchuks. We visit the sprawling Trongsa Dzong, perhaps the most impressive Dzong in the kingdom. It is one of the



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most aesthetic and magnificent works of traditional Bhutanese architecture. Given its strategic location high above the Mande Chhu, it is often described as being perched so high on a mountain that clouds float below it.

After lunch, we continue along the road to the Bumthang Dzongkag (district) and the town of Jakar, our base for the next two nights. Along the way we visit yathra weaving studios where hand-spun, hand-woven wool strips with patterns specific to the Bumthang region are created. These strips were once used as shawls and raincoats to protect against the winter cold of Bumthang, but today they are more often fashioned into short jackets that women wear. The Bumthang region encompasses four major valleys: Choskhor, Tang, Ura and Chhume. The dzongs and the most important temples are in the large Choskhor valley, commonly referred to as the Bumthang Valley. Different from most other valleys in Bhutan, Bumthang is spacious and open and ideal for walkers and hikers. There are numerous Buddhist monasteries and pilgrimage sites to explore, making it the cultural and historic center of Bhutan.

Considered the cultural heartland of Bhutan, it was here that Buddhism was introduced by Padmasambhava in A.D 746, and the area continues to thrive as a spiritual center. The wide valleys with fields of buckwheat, apple orchards, and chalet-like houses everywhere, surrounded by pine forested hills, make Bumthang extremely beautiful. We can explore **Kurjey Temple**: The name Kurjey means body print. Guru Rinpoche has left his body print on a rock inside the main temple. The big cypress tree is believed to be the walking stick of Guru Rinpoche. Guru also created a holy water hold beside the temple. The **Jambay Lhakhang Temple** is one of the 108 temples built by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo on the same day as Paro Kyichu Temple. The temple hosts Guru Jowo Jampa the future Buddha as its main statue. The **Jakar Dzong** is built on a ridge that overlooks the valley. Inside the Dzong there still remains the tunnel which was used to fetch water during war. It is believed that Lam Ngagi Wangchuk had chosen a site for the construction of a Dzong in the lower valley of Chokor. While performing a ritual, a white bird flew out of the site and landed on the place where the current Jakar Dzong is built. Considering this as an auspicious sign, a small Dzong was built and named Jakar, meaning White Bird. If time permits, we may end the day with visit to a Swiss farm, where you may purchase cheese, apple cider, brandy and other products of Bumthang. We may also visit the Kharchu monastery during their evening theological debate.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Hotel: Riverlodge : www.drukriverlodge.com



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Days 8 & 9 - Gangtey –Thu. & Fri. – 14th & 15th March 2013 (5-6 hours)

After breakfast we drive to Gangtey from Bumthang with a stop in Chendebji for lunch. On route to Gangtey is Trongsa, the ancestral home of the ruling dynasty. **Trongsa**, literally "New Town" in the Dzongkha language, is where the current monarchy had its origin in Bhutan. Each King in the line of succession has held the post of Trongsa Penlop or Governor before donning the Raven Crown. We will visit **Trongsa Dzong**, the foundations of which were laid in the 16th century by Pema Lingpa. The Dzong flourished during the 17th century under Shabdrung Ngwang Namgyal. With its massive structure, its wall looming high above the winding Mangde Chu Valley, the Dzong commands the east-west road. Built as a watch tower the **Taa Dzong** has since been turned into a Heritage Museum.

We cross two high passes over 3000m and a couple of villages along the route. The wide glacial valley is composed of Phobjikha and Gangtey Valley, but due to the Gangtey monastery that dates back to the 17th century, the place is commonly known as Gangtey. The construction of the Gangtey Gumpa was prophesied by Terton Pema Lingpa the treasure revealer. A few kilometers past the Gumpa, on the valley floor is the village of Phobjikha. The valley is one of the protected areas within **Jigme Singye W National Park**. This is the winter home of the endangered black-necked cranes that migrate from the Tibetan plateau from late October till March to the milder and lower climate.

We visit the Nature Conservation Centre to learn about the black Necked Cranes that fly into this valley from the Tibet each winter. We visit the ancient Gangteng Gumpa monastery with its complex includes monk quarters, meditation centers, a school, and small hotel. We continue on to the Phobjikha Valley, a designated conservation area and one of the most important wildlife preserves (Jigme Singye W National Park) in Bhutan. After visiting the monastic School nearby, we browse along the local village, the perfect place to relax and enjoy the scenery, before returning to our hotel.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Hotel: Dewachen. www.hotelpedling.com

Day 10 & 11 – Paro – Sat. & Sun – 16th & 17th March 2013 (5 hours)

After breakfast, we head to Paro, re-crossing the magnificent Dochu La Pass, with opportunities to see the panoramic views of the Eastern Himalayas. At the pass, we stop to savor tea at a cafeteria that offers incredible views of the snow-capped peaks. Enroute we take a short walk through the paddy fields and villages nearby to



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visit Chimi Lhakhang Temple, dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kunley (1455 - 1529). Popularly known as ‘the divine madman’ he is folk hero or a cultural icon around whom countless yarns of facts and fiction, and stories and legends have been spun. He is known for his unconventional ways of preaching Buddhism. Drukpa Kuenley has long been a pilgrimage site for childless couples. This easy walk takes about ½ hour each way.

We will visit the **National Museum**, housed in the round multi-storied Ta Dzong, built in 1775. The Ta Dzong was once the watch tower for the massive Paro Dzong, built by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Unlike the rectangular shape of the Dzong, Ta Dzong is conical, more like that of a European castle. It was converted to a Museum in 1967. The museum’s collection includes ancient artifacts, weapons, collection of antique thangka (painted or embroidered religious pictures), textiles, and stamps.

Paro Rinpung Dzong, the religious and secular center of Paro is certainly the most dominant feature in the valley. The approach to the Dzong is through a traditional covered cantilever bridge. It was first conceived in the 15th-century, and finally consecrated in 1646. This Dzong is known as the Fortress of the heap of Jewels.

We will also visit **Drukgyel Dzong**, with a delightful village nestling at its foot. The dzong caught fire in 1951 and now remains as a ruined fortress where Bhutanese warriors fought Tibetan invaders centuries ago. It was built in 1649 to commemorate Bhutan’s victory over Tibetan invaders, and sits at the point where the trail from Tibet enters the Paro valley. Bhutan’s dzongs are perhaps the most visibly striking aspect of the kingdom and these huge citadels dominate the landscape of the major towns and act as the administrative headquarters for their respective regions. If we are lucky and the weather is clear, we may have the opportunity to view the sacred Mt. Jhomolhari (23,977 ft), which lies along the border of Tibet and Bhutan.

On day 11, in the early morning, we hike to the famous cliff-hermitage called **Taktsang**, undeniably one of the main highlights of visit to Bhutan. Takstang literally meaning Tiger's Nest, is one of the most venerated and famous of Bhutan's monasteries. Located on the face of a sheer 1000m cliff above Paro valley, it is an impressive sight accessible only by trek or on the horse/pony. The trek to the Tea house is a steep one-hour uphill (about 350m ascent). From the tea house or Cafeteria (at 2940m), one can get a close-up view of Takstang. You can choose to trek further uphill for another 45 minutes or enjoy the views from the cafeteria. The trail further uphill ascends steeply to a high observation point (3140m) where there is a Chorten (stupa). Then descend the flight of cliff-hanging steps on the narrow trail to a beautiful waterfall that plunges down the deep chasm and alongside is a retreat hermitage.



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Legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava, the great Buddhist master of Oddiyana, who spread the Buddhism across the entire Himalayas is said to have flown here (8th century) on the back of a Tigris, in order to subdue negative spiritual forces that were hostile to spread of Buddhism. The Stupa contains the mortal remains of one of his students Pelgyi Senge who mediated in the main cave. Subsequently many great spiritual masters passed periods of profound meditation here. In 1692, Gyelse Tenzin Rabgye built a two storey temple here, which over the period of time was expanded and refurbished. In April 1998, tragically, two of the three temples were completely burnt by fire but have since been restored to its original splendor.

We enjoy lunch and the views of the valley below at the Taktsang teahouse before descending to the valley floor.

Note: 3-4 hours on hiking trails is required with approximate elevation gain of 1,650 feet. Ponies/mules are provided on request (additional cost) for the uphill hike until the Takstang Cafeteria. For hikes beyond and for return (downhill) you must be able to walk.

We return to our lodge for an afternoon or relaxation and browsing the local markets. This evening we bid farewell to Bhutan over dinner of traditional Bhutanese cuisine.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner **Hotel:** Dhekyi Resort : www.dhekyedresort.bt

Day 12 – Paro – New Delhi, India - Monday, 18th March 2013

Today, the morning is at leisure to relax at our hotel or in the local markets until departure time for the airport to board our flights to New Delhi. We will be greeted by a representative awaiting our arrival to transfer us to our hotel.

Meals: Breakfast **Hotel:** The Lalit or Radisson Blu

Day 13 – Depart New Delhi – Tuesday, 19th March 2013

For those departing today, a transfer to IGI airport for your onward journey is included. If you are spending a few more days in Delhi, please arrange your “insider experiences” with Tara at the time of reservations.

Bon Voyage



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Note:

- It is important to reserve your trip early, as the Bhutanese national airline will only accept reservations with the full payment of the ticket. Therefore we are unable to hold group seats in advance of reservations. At this time, seats are available for this departure, but they can only be confirmed upon receipt of your deposit and full payment for the flights. Please contact TaraGupta01@gmail.com for additional information.
- Due to flight schedule changes or inclement weather, India by Design reserves the right to modify the itinerary. All travelers will be notified ASAP.
- Often we are exploring locales with just 2-10 guests. The nature of small group travel is such that we travel at a pace that is comfortable for the entire group, with a spirit of flexibility and adventure, all part of this intimate experience.