



WILD WOMEN
expeditions

BHUTAN HIKING ADVENTURE

13 DAYS

For more information please contact: adventure@wildwomenexpeditions.com or call 1 (888) 993-1222.



EXPERIENCE BHUTAN

On our Bhutan Hiking Adventure, your heart will swell in the embrace of a country that covets happiness above all else. Every policy must pass a happiness filter to be enacted.

Trekking through the velvet green valleys of a remote Himalayan kingdom, yak herders will greet you with wide smiles. The reverberating chant of monks residing in cliffside monasteries will be felt in your ribcage. This is the “Land of the Thunder Dragon” and the colourful prayer flags and flowering alpine meadows are kindling for spiritual renewal.

Over thirteen soul-expansive days, you’ll trek through tidy rice paddy terraces, rural villages, through blue pine forests and sleep in Himalayan valleys peppered with sacred sites. You’ll have the opportunity to visit countless monasteries, nunneries and ancient fortresses. From the fever pitch of the Jakar festival (if your departure coincides with the festival dates) to the fabled “Burning Lake” to the arrival of the rare black-necked cranes returning to their wintering grounds—Bhutan is a diverse, enlightening and panorama-packed destination.

It’s an itinerary of surprises at every turn from a 3-storey golden Buddha, the Snowman trek ‘finish line’ and whitewater rafting on the aggressive Pho and Mo rivers! The legendary Tiger’s Nest has its own magnetic pull and on the two-day Bumdra Monastery Trek, you’ll feel the ancient pulse of gurus, tigress legends and tall tales.

A trip to Bhutan isn’t complete without an introduction to the “Divine Madman” and his 15th century artwork that centered on giant penises and his encouragement to laugh a lot and have sex whenever possible.

Bonus: You’ll spend a night at the 5-star Zhiwa Ling Lodge—dubbed one of National Geographic’s “Unique Lodges of the World!” Zhiwa Ling means “Land of Peace” and this is undeniable. Come experience Bhutan and all its surprises.



Upon arrival from Delhi, Calcutta, Kathmandu or Bangkok, our guide will meet us at the small and friendly Paro International Airport.

Suggested Flight Route: Bangkok (BKK) is the easiest route as it has the most flight options (1-2 flights daily). We recommend choosing Bhutan Airlines.

Paro is situated in the flat valley bottom in a region peppered with more than 150 temples and monasteries.

We'll crack off on a one to two hour hike (depending on the group's pace) along the forested hillside from Ta Dzong to Zuri Dzong. We'll pass by the Gonsaka Lhakhang (a revered old temple with a meditation cave) and then Zuri Dzong, with expansive views over the valley and Paro Dzong. The five-storey Zuri Dzong is considered one of the oldest dzongs in the area (dating back to 1352), and is home to the valley's protector god.

Our walk will continue down to the Uma Resort junction to absorb more astonishing views before our driver picks us up at the Paro bridge.

We will also arrange an archery lesson today, putting a bull's eye on a perfect first day in Bhutan.

Meals Included: Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Metta Resort, Paro

Hike altitude at starting point: 2350 m

Highest Altitude: 2400 m

Hike Distance & timing: 2 km, 1.5 hours, easy



We'll rise early to take a one hour super scenic drive along the Paro and Thimphu river valleys to Bhutan's lofty 2,320 m (7,612 ft) capital, Thimpu. If our itinerary coincides, we can visit the weekly market and the iconic Memorial Chorten with its golden spire. Chorten is one of the most visible religious landmarks in Bhutan but differs from other stupas as it does not enshrine human remains.

Next, we will visit the domineering statue of Buddha Dordenma, which commands a tremendous view of Thimphu valley. The huge 3-storey throne holds several chapels and the body of Dordenma itself is filled with 125,000 smaller statues of Buddha (not Matryoshka doll-style-but wouldn't that be impressive?).

If time permits, we will visit RENEW (a non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment of women and children in Bhutan), and meet one of the team members to hear about their amazing work.

In the afternoon, we will drive approximately 3 hours to the old capital, Punakha, via Dochu La pass. Perched at 3,050 m (10,000 ft), we'll stop for a very high and hot drink and take in the spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalaya ranges. From here, it's easy to notice the dramatic change in climate and vegetation as we approach our accommodations in the low-lying eastern Himalayan town of Punakha at 1,250 m (4,106 ft). This area is known for Punakha Dzong, a 17th-century fortress at the juncture of the mighty Pho and Mo Chhu rivers that are split by the old dzong that sits on a promontory between the two.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Zhingkhram Resort, Punakha



Have a good stretch before hopping into our shuttle this morning as it will take around 4 hours to reach Trongsa, the gateway to central Bhutan at 2,180m (7,152ft). En route, we will stop at Tsangkha Tashicholing, a monastery known for its elaborate arts and crafts training institute. Here, around 45 young and eager monks learn the traditional skills of woodcarving, sculpture, painting and embroidery.

Set amidst jaw-dropper scenery, Trongsa Dzong is the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family. We'll visit Ta Dzong, the watchtower museum dedicated to the Wangchuk dynasty and learn of the tall tales surrounding the Dzong and the valley it has protected from internal rebellion for centuries. For museum junkies, Ta Dzong also features personal belongings of the former kings and queens of Bhutan.

Built by Chogyal Minjur Tempa, the 1st Governor of Trongsa in 1652, Ta Dzong has four observation points resembling a tiger, lion, garuda and dragon.

Fun fact: In Hindu mythology, the Garuda is a legendary bird or bird-like creature that is the reliable mount (ie. private jet) of the god Vishnu.

We'll stay in Trongsa tonight. This town is situated on a steep ridge and the views of the deep valleys surrounding it are trance-inducing. Trongsa Dzong is visible from almost everywhere in town and appears nearly magical as the ridge it sits on unfolds into the clouds on its south side.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Yangkhil Resort, Trongsa



Today we'll have a 3-hour drive that snakes through some of Bhutan's most alluring landscapes to Bumthang, an area of impossibly high valleys at 2,580 to 3,100 m (8,465 to 10,171 ft). This is the spiritual, beating heartland of Bhutan and it's witnessed in the countless legendary monasteries, temples and palaces.

Bumthang is the collective name for the area of four valleys – Chokhor, Tang, Ura, and Chumey.

Our guide will lead us on a riveting walking and/or driving tour of a variety of sacred sites including Jamba Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang and Mebar Tsho (“The Burning Lake”).

The Burning Lake is one of Bhutan's most important pilgrimage sites. According to Atlas Obscura, “in the 15th century, Pema Lingpa had a vision that treasure was hidden in a pool where the Tang Chhu River widens. When the locals questioned the validity of his prediction, he submerged himself in the water holding a lit butter lamp, and resurfaced with a chest and a scroll, the lamp still aflame.” Be forewarned, the lake would be better described as a pool along the river!

Today, you will have the opportunity to take relax with a hot stone bath at a local farmhouse. Later, we may have time to also visit Bhutan's largest Dzong (Jakar), with its hypnotic location overlooking the Chokhor valley. We'll be sleeping in Bumthang tonight, hugged by the sacred valleys and views.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Gongkhar Guesthouse, Bumthang



Today we'll strike off from the Swiss Guesthouse Hotel on a heart-thumpin' 15 km hike to Babzur via Petseling monastery.

We'll hike past Petseling monastery, which is home to 70 monks. Built in 1769, this monastery is known for one particular flower, the Dongdola. It blossoms in both the summer and winter, and the powerful fragrance seems to be a gentle offering to the gods and goddesses. Cuckoos frequent this area as well, enjoying the

serenity and surroundings just as the monks do!

From this vantage point, we'll fill our memory cards with staggering panoramic views over the Bumthang valley. In the distance, we'll also be able to see the finish line of Bhutan's most challenging, high-altitude 25-day trail, the Snowman trek.

Fun fact: The Snowman trek is so named for the six mountains over 7,000 m (23,100 ft.) which the trek passes beneath. Crossing nine passes over 4,500 m (15,850 ft). Or, you can stop to smell the Dongdolas instead!

We'll trek onwards to the village of Babzur and its meadow blurred with sun-worn prayer flags and dramatic views of Kunzangdrak Gompa monastery. We'll take five and enjoy our packed lunch here before walking another 1.5 hours through the shade of the blue pine forest until we reach the feeder road where our hike ends.

As we head back to Jakar town, we will have the opportunity to visit Babzur museum (subject to opening times) and Pema Choling Nunnery which houses about 100 nunes from the ages of 12 to 70 years!

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Gongkhar Guesthouse, Bumthang

Hike via Petseling:

Altitude at starting point: 2500 m

Highest Altitude: 3300 m

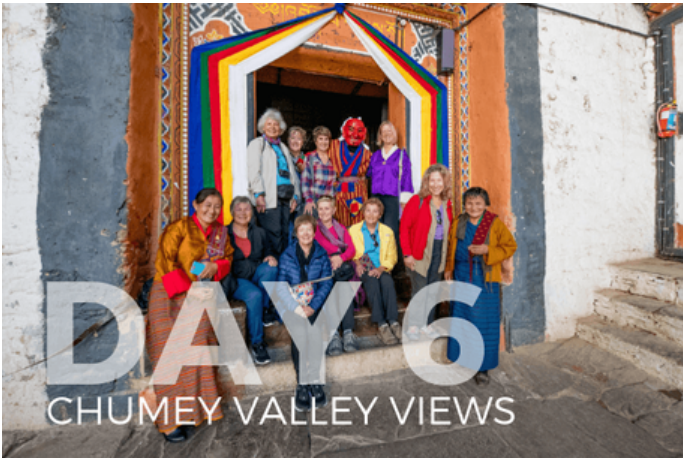
Hike Distance & timing: 15 km, 7 hours, moderate

Hike easier alternative:

Altitude at starting point: 2500 m

Highest Altitude: 2800 m

Hike Distance & timing: 12 km, 4.5 hours, moderate



Today we'll have a 2 hour drive to Tharpaling Gomba and visit Kikila, which is located on the hillside above Bumthang. The monastery was built by a great saint called Kuenkhen Longchen Runjam and is home to about 100 monks.

We'll take the day for a gradual walk up a narrow path above the monastery to the ridge of Tharpaling (which translates as salvation) at 3800 metres where you will get a wonderful

view over the Gyatsa, Domkha and Chumey valleys and you can also see a big statue of Longchen Rabjampa – the founder of Tharpaling Monastery.

From there we'll walk another couple of hours down towards Lama Gomba. The walk runs along the ridge of Kikila towards Kikila pass through blue pine forest containing a large variety of wildflowers and plants and finally follows the traditional trek route between Trongsa and Bumthang (the Royal Heritage Trail) finishing with a wonderful view of Jakar Dzong. Once our walk is complete, we'll be transported back to the hotel for an afternoon cooking class and some well deserved rest at our accommodations in Bumthang.

NOTE: If there is a festival that coincides with your departure date, a visit to the festival may replace this day's itinerary.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Gongkhar Guesthouse, Bumthang

Hike altitude at starting point: via Tharpaling 3700 m

Highest Altitude: 3800 – 3900 m

Hike Distance & timing: 12 km, 5 hours, moderate



Today our drive to Gangtey will be about six hours. This remote and tranquil area is a natural sanctuary for the hundreds of rare black-necked cranes that annually arrive the last week of October from the Tibetan plateau to roost for the winter amongst the farms and villages.

The crane is considered sacred and there's a festival dedicated to the bird's return. The Black-necked species with an 8-foot wingspan,

is the only alpine crane in the world. They favour the dwarf bamboo that grows in the valley's alpine wetlands. In the Phobjikha Valley, locals honor and protect these elegant cranes as it is believed that they are connected to bountiful harvests and prosperity.

We'll witness the immenseness of Phobjikha valley, a glacial region that has remained untouched by the modern world, as well as knock-out views of the Black Mountains.

Our next stop will be Gangtey Gomba, one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries (and recently extensively renovated). During the summer months, it's inhabited by monks. Contentment is easily found in the undulating valleys at every turn. We'll stay in Gangtey tonight and let our dreams take flight on the wings of cranes.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Dewachen Resort



We'll explore the Phobjikha Valley today at a casual pace. From the Dewachen Hotel, we'll walk to the Black-necked Crane Information Centre to learn more about the valley and its famous migrating birds. From the Centre, we can easily walk to Beta Village and Gangtey Gumpa.

We'll walk along the Gangtey Nature Trail, past the farmhouses of Semchubara village and slice through the grassy plains and stands of

blue pines covered in "old man's beard." Hopefully we'll see some cranes, too! They are usually observed feeding on the valley marshlands from late October to mid-February.

At the end of the nature trail we'll head to Kingathang village to visit a temple built by Bhutan's Queen Mother. From Kingathang, we can walk via Yusa village back to our hotel. The total distance is 12 to 13km (7.5-8 miles) or 6 to 7 hours.

Later, hamstrings humming, we'll drive to Wangdi, a small mountain and riverside town originally considered Bhutan's secondary capital. After 10 years of painstaking work to repair the damage from the fire of 2012, Wangdi Dzong will reopen in October 2022. The dzong was gutted by fire in just a few hours—the blaze destroyed the centuries old building.

It's an odd twist of fate that the monastery was being renovated at the time of the fire, so most of the relics were safely in storage elsewhere.

After a full day of sacred sites and miles on foot, we'll retire to our accommodations in Wangdi for the night.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Wangdi Ecolodge, Wangdi

Hike altitude at starting point: 2900 m

Highest Altitude: 2900 m

Hike Distance & timing: 13 km, 6 hours, easy



Today we'll embark on a 3km (1.9 mile) hike to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten through the village and rice paddy fields of Yebisa. We'll begin by crossing the nerve-jangling suspension bridge below Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten to Yebisa and continue another 40 to 50 minutes up to the 30m temple. This section of the walk is gradual but there are some steeper parts. The reward is found at the top where we'll have postcard views of the valley and surrounding villages.

After visiting the temple and posing for a dozen grinning group photos, we'll descend for 30 minutes until we reach the suspension bridge where a shuttle will be waiting for us.

In the afternoon we'll go rafting on the Pho Chhu ("Male") or Mo ("Female") Chhu river! Each has 10 to 15 class 2-4 rapids to help spike your adrenaline! (*Waterproof pants and shoes will be provided for this thrill ride.)

After our whitewater experience, we'll return to solid ground and the calm found in the deeply impressive Punakha Dzong or "Palace of Great Happiness".

In the evening, enjoy your dinner at a local farmhouse and if you wish, participate in cooking the meal.

We'll stay in Wangdi again tonight!

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Wangdi Ecolodge, Wangdi

Hike altitude at starting point: 1250 m

Highest Altitude: 1400 m

Hike Distance & timing: 3 km, 3 hours, easy



This morning we'll walk for around one hour across the tidy terraced fields of Sopsokha village to Chimi Lhakhang ("Temple of Fertility") built in the 15th century by the Lama Drukpa Kuenley-known best by his handle of the Divine Madman. One of the country's most-loved saints, the Divine Madman was deemed a crazy yogi who taught in an unconventional way. His teachings were a curricula of outrageous behaviour, song and poetry-all vain attempts to awaken Buddha nature by

laughing and having a lot more sex. You'll see evidence of his antics/teachings throughout the country in the form of painted penises on local houses.

Semi-enlightened, we'll return to Paro (a 4-hour drive). If time permits, it might be possible to drive up to Chele La pass today and visit Kila Gumpa nunnery, reputed to be the oldest in Bhutan. The 9th century meditation site has seven small temples and several retreat huts cleverly built into the sheer cliffside where seventy nuns live in self-imposed isolation.

Chele La Pass separates the valleys of Haa and Paro and at 3,810m (12,500ft), it is one of the highest vantage points as well as the highest drivable passes in Bhutan with edible views of the sacred mountains Jomolhari and Jichu Drakey.

This evening we'll need to sort our luggage to repack for the trek. Anything we don't need will be kept safely in Paro. Our accommodation tonight will be at the luxe 5-star Zhiwa Ling lodge-dubbed one of National Geographic's "Unique Lodges of the World!"

Zhiwa Ling means "Land of Peace" and this is undeniable. The 45-room hotel faces the sheer rocky cliffs that surround Tiger's Nest Temple. This strategic position is believed to bring good fortune to those who spend the night in the pampered embrace. Be sure to admire the Buddhist shrine upstairs-it's constructed with 450-year-old wood from a remote monastery.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Dinner
Accommodations: Zhiwaling Resort, Paro
Hike altitude at starting point: 1300 m
Highest Altitude: 1300 m
Hike Distance & timing: 2 km, 1.5 hours, easy



Today we begin our highly anticipated two-day camping trip trek high up on the hillside outside Paro. The trek begins with a one hour drive from Paro to Sang Choekor Buddhist College where we will start walking at an altitude of about 2,800m (9,186ft). The climb will be gradual through fragrant blue pine and juniper forest. After about three hours, we'll reach the majestic mountainside temple, Chhoe Chhoe Tse Lhakhang.

We'll continue climbing for another 20 minutes until we re-enter the shadows of the forest, and after about 40 minutes, we'll emerge into an alpine meadow of chortens (Buddhist shrines) and colourful prayer flags flapping and snapping in the breeze.

Our campsite is just below the nearby Bumdra Monastery, at about 3,800 meters (12,467ft). The snowy, sweeping Himalayan vistas are unreal. We will have an opportunity to visit the monastery and climb the 4000m (13,123ft) peak to swallow up the views before returning to camp.

Today's walk is 15km (9 miles)—but with our heads swiveling to take in the vistas, our legs won't even be aware of the distance covered.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Campsite

Hike altitude at starting point: 2800 m

Highest Altitude: 3800 m

Hike Distance & timing: 15 km, 5 hours, long/steep/challenging



We'll begin today's 16km hike with a descent through the haven of the forest and after a couple of hours, witness the emergence of numerous temples. From the gardens of Sangtopelri, we'll be able to look down and see the signature roofs of Taktshang monastery far below. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to this site riding on a tigress and meditated here for three months.

This is one of Bhutan's most holy sites and it draws pilgrims from Bhutan and neighbouring Buddhist countries in a powerful magnetic pull. We'll keep descending through the primeval forest, to the famous and spectacular Tiger's Nest monastery itself. Constructed in 1692, the cave where Guru first meditated is said to be the introduction of Buddhism to Bhutan.

From the sacred Nest it's about an hour down to our end point, where we'll meet our vehicle to return to Paro. Nearby, we can also visit Kyichu Lhakhang, a temple believed to have been built in 659 by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. Pilgrims walk around this temple, spinning its numerous prayer wheels.

Enjoy a cultural show at your accommodations in the evening! (This experience will be organized if your departure date does not coincide with any festivals during your trip).

Meals Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Zhiwaling Resort, Paro

Hike altitude at starting point: 3800 m

Highest Altitude: decent to 2400 m

Hike Distance & timing: 16 km, 6 hours, easy downhill though steep



Early in the morning, our guide will accompany us to the airport. With renewed spirit and pounding hearts we'll embrace and wish each other "Tashi Delek" (goodbye and good luck!) until next time.

Meals Included: Breakfast

ITINERARY DISCLAIMER

Wild Women Expeditions and our local partners intend to adhere to the described itinerary. This is only a general guide to follow on your tour of the region. Our itineraries are subject to change, as we cannot predict the weather or other environmental conditions. We are continually striving to make improvements to all our trips based on feedback from Wild Women members, guides, partners, and other research. We reserve the right to alter itineraries based on the above at any time.

*Itinerary version as of January 30, 2024.

Please note: This itinerary involves a three different days of long hikes that involve steady uphill and steady downhill sections. Preparing for elevation and altitude is essential. The group's pace and skill level will ultimately determine the length and duration of the daily hikes and Wild. Women Expeditions encourages Wild Women to properly train for this demanding but rewarding adventure. Hiking poles are strongly recommended due to the long up and downs terrain—please familiarize yourself with how to properly use them in your pre-trip training.

IS THIS TRIP RIGHT FOR ME?

This is an active adventure travel trip. We would like you to be comfortable with the following:

- Hiking an average of 2-6 hours per day for 6 days over 2 weeks
- Climbing uphill to heights of 4200 metres above sea level on select hiking days
- Driving on winding and steep mountain roads for 2-5 hrs (with breaks!)
- Physical Rating: 3 of 5. Moderate > Good level of fitness required

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All ground transportation as outlined in the itinerary including airport transfers
- 12 nights accommodation in lodges, inns, luxury 5-star resort and one-night camping
- 13 breakfasts, 13 lunches, 12 dinners (incl. drinking water and hot drinks)
- An experienced, awesome Bhutanese English-speaking female guide
- Porters and all camping equipment for Tiger's Nest expedition
- All entry fees and permits
- Optional single private upgrade, subject to availability
- All applicable taxes are included in the trip price