

2019 BEST OF BHUTAN

THE HIDDEN SHANGRI-LA KINGDOM & EASTERN BHUTAN



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10 – 27 MAR 2019 • 18 DAYS • 12 GUESTS

Join us on an unforgettable journey into the “Land of the Thunder Dragon” Bhutan, a Shangri-La Kingdom perched on top of the world, shrouded in mystery and magic. Long shut off from the rest of the world, Bhutan has retained a culture and lifestyle that revolves around the sacred. Monks live out their reverence in glorious monasteries and nuns devote their lives to charity. Traveling through the mountains reveals mystical views of holy peaks and passes. It’s no wonder these mountain ranges are said to house deities within. Be swept away by the energy, spirit and beauty of Bhutan.

On this adventure, you will witness a land of great beauty; with wild untouched landscapes, hamlets and monasteries clinging to the sides of rugged mountains and raging rivers deep down in the valleys. Walk amongst the red-robed monks as we journey between lush valleys, each with an abundance of flora on full display and dotted with ancient temples, remote villages and majestic Dzongs. Journey to remote villages with superb mountain vistas to meet mountain tribes and ethnic minorities. Meet the Bhutanese people, with their deep-rooted belief in Buddhism and experience their daily lives, including visits to the nomadic Yak herders and families living in remote traditional villages. Learn how the Bhutanese people have carefully-preserved traditional lifestyle in the quest for pure happiness. Stroll through artisan markets, explore temples decorated with exquisite and flamboyant designs and walk through pristine forests surrounded by misty mountains rising from fast flowing rivers. Be thrilled by the rush of a river rafting excursion and hike to the gravity defying Tiger’s Nest Monastery with its jaw-dropping mountain vistas. Observe the essence of Bhutan with its unspoiled culture, environment and society and learn about the traditional ways of life that have survived unchanged by the passage of time.

Once a year the small town of *Gomphu Kora* comes alive with grand festivities. Witness elaborately decorated masked dancers perform their traditional rituals to the tunes of ancient horns, drums and symbols. Listen to the enchanting songs and melodies of the local dancing girls as the Bhutanese people gather for the colorful celebrations of *Gomphu Kora* festival.

POST EXTENSION – SAGALA PASS TREK

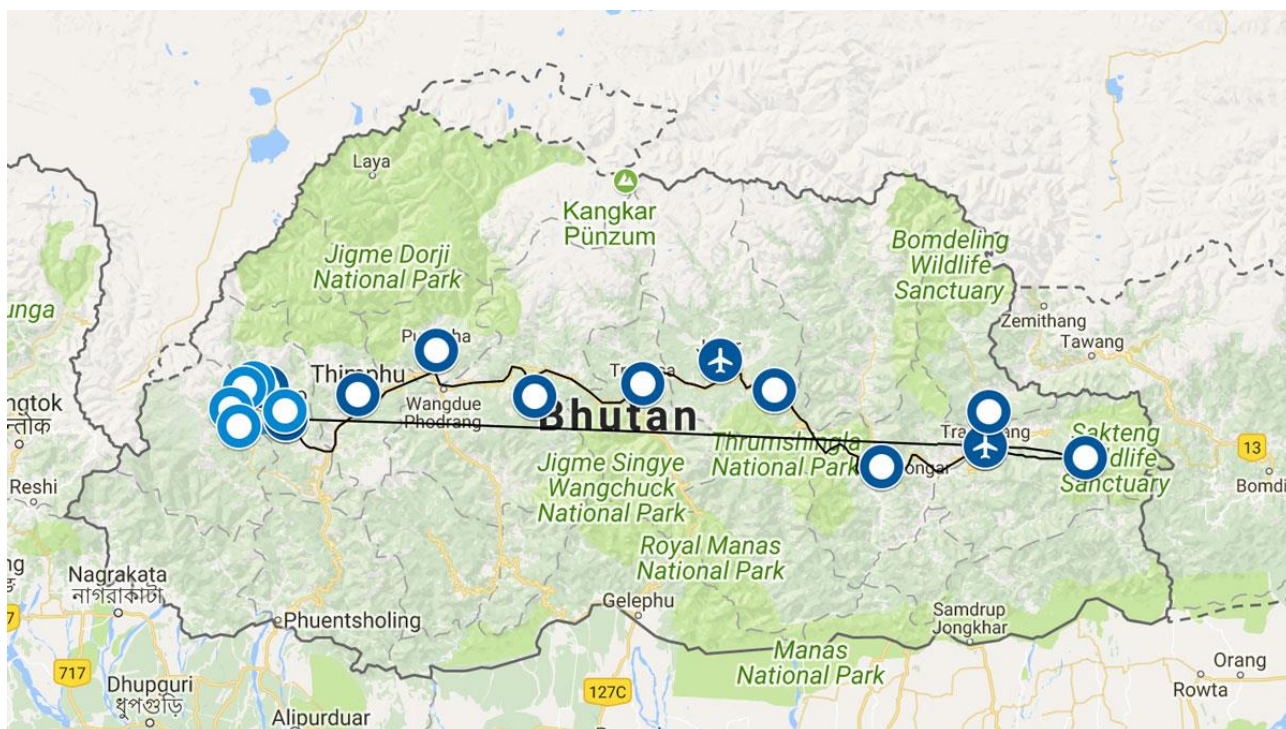
For the more fit and active, finish your Bhutan adventure with the *Sagala Pass Trek Post-Extension*. This 2-day trek is designed for those that love hiking in the mountains. Walk through pristine forests, cross creeks and hike over a mountain pass with 360° mountain views, including some of world’s highest mountain peaks. Camp on a wonderful meadow and witness the daily life of traditional Yak herders. Hike the ancient trade route from Paro valley across Sagala mountain pass down to the recently opened Haa Valley.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit ancient fortresses (incl. Tiger's Nest), sacred monasteries and remote temples.
- Travel through mystical landscapes with glorious mountain passes & Himalayan peaks.
- Be moved by the colorful *Gomphu Kora* festival.
- Engage with mountain tribes and Yak herders.
- Experience authentic Bhutanese living and genuine hospitality.
- See swirling fields of Rhododendrons and walk through lush valleys and misty forests.
- River raft on the Mo Chu River.
- Witness the traditional daily lives of Monks, Nuns, Yak herders and farmers.
- Overnight at high-end *Aman* and *Uma by Como Resort* properties.

TRIP DESIGN

In 2017 Thomas was invited by Tshering, our exceptional Bhutanese guide and friend, on a month long scouting trip across the whole country of Bhutan. Following this extensive expedition, Thomas & Tshering put together what they believe is the ultimate Bhutan expedition; including not only the iconic must-see sites, but also unique and rarely visited places and incorporating exclusive ceremonies and special events. The key was to cherry-pick the best accommodations, the greatest locations and most importantly the most wonderful life enriching experiences.



[CLICK TO VIEW IN GOOGLE MAPS](#)

ITINERARY OVERVIEW

BEST OF BHUTAN – THE HIDDEN SHANGRI-LA KINGDOM & EASTERN BHUTAN

Day 01 Mar 10	Arrive in Bangkok, Delhi or Kathmandu en route to Paro, Bhutan
Day 02 Mar 11	Arrive in Paro / Dzong and Town visit
Day 03 Mar 12	Fly to Trashigang/ Dzong and Town visit
Day 04 Mar 13	Cultural experience with monks in traditional village
Day 05 Mar 14	Merak / Mountain Tribe
Day 06 Mar 15	Merak / Radi Rice Terraces and Nunnery / Trashigang
Day 07 Mar 16	Gomphu Kora Festival
Day 08 Mar 17	Mongar to Ura Valley
Day 09 Mar 18	Ura Valley to Bumthang / Explore Bumthang Valley
Day 10 Mar 19	Bumthang – Trongsa
Day 11 Mar 20	Trongsa – Phobjikha / Phobjikha valley walk and Monastery
Day 12 Mar 21	Phobjikha – Punaka / Phobjikha valley / Punaka Dzong
Day 13 Mar 22	Punaka / Temple walk / River rafting
Day 14 Mar 23	Punakha – Thimphu / Fertility temple / Suspension bridge / Thimphu
Day 15 Mar 24	Thimphu – Paro / Deluxe Camp
Day 16 Mar 25	Tiger's Nest Monastery / Deluxe Camp / Special farewell event
Day 17 Mar 26	Fly home OR join Sagala Pass Trek Post-Extension
Day 18 Mar 27	Arrive home

SAGALA PASS TREK - POST-EXTENSION

Day 17 Mar 26	Trek from Paro valley to Sagala pass camp / Yak herders
Day 18 Mar 27	Trek to Haa Valley / Return to Paro
Day 19 Mar 28	Paro / Fly home
Day 20 Mar 29	Arrive home



ITINERARY

BEST OF BHUTAN - THE HIDDEN SHANGRI-LA KINGDOM & EASTERN BHUTAN

Day 01. Mar 10, 2019. Depart Home / En-route to Bangkok, Dehli or Kathmandu.

Depart home and fly to either Bangkok, Delhi or Kathmandu en route to Paro, Bhutan. Arrive to Bangkok or Delhi the night before as ready for your very early morning flight with Druk Air to Paro.

Day 02. Mar 11, 2019. Arrive in Paro / Paro Dzong and Town visit

Early morning flight from Bangkok, Delhi or Kathmandu to Paro. On arrival to Paro, be greeted by our wonderful Bhutanese host and lead guide Tshering Dorji. Transfer to the beautiful *Zhiwa Ling Hotel* for lunch. This lovely Bhutanese lodge, set on 10 acres, combines the sensibilities of a fine Bhutanese guesthouse with the best of 21st Century amenities. Awarded by *National Geographic* as one of the “*Unique and Extraordinary Lodges of the World*” in 2016, it is the only Bhutanese owned 5* hotel. Honoring the spiritual heritage of this ancient Buddhist kingdom. A temple has been built into the second floor of the hotel, made with 450-year-old timbers from the famous *Gangtey Monastery*, the crowning glory of this new cultural landmark.

After lunch drive to the *Ringpung Dzong* (meaning “fortress on a head of Jewels”), a 17th century fortress towering over the valley of Paro, like most Dzongs, it house’s both the monastic body and district government offices including the local courts. After visiting the interior and courtyard of the Dzong, a stairway leads down to the monastic quarter, which is home to about 200 monks. Continue down the hill and walk across a traditional cantilevered wooden bridge spanning across the *Paro Chhu* river to downtown Paro. After a short stroll through town, with some handicraft shopping opportunities head up the *Chelela pass* road to see stunning rice terraces and little villages from a great vantage point. Take photographs of the Dzong at sunset before returning to your hotel for the night. Join your Expedition leaders Natalia and Tshering at the “*Mad Monk Bar*” for a pre-dinner welcome cocktail party followed by a welcome dinner.

Overnight: *Zhiwa Ling Hotel Paro – Junior Suite in Cottage (L/D)*

Day 03. Mar 12, 2019. Fly to Trashigang / Dzong and Town visit

After an early breakfast, enjoy a short but spectacular flight through the Himalayas and land on a mountain top airstrip near *Trashigang*. Travel through the hills to the lovely *Lingkhar Lodge* in time for lunch. This afternoon visit the *Trashigang Dzong* and enjoy a stroll through the small town of *Trashigang*, the headquarter of the eastern most district of Bhutan. Enjoy a lovely dinner at the lodge with scenic views over the valley.

Overnight: *Lingkhar Lodge – Cottage room (B/L/D)*

Day 04. Mar 13, 2019. Trashigang and local rural village ceremony

After breakfast at the lodge, visit a remote farming village where you'll have the opportunity to take part in a private food and prayer ceremony and the opportunity to witness the everyday life of Buddhist monks, followed by a sumptuous lunch with the monks and the local community. Take a stroll through the village and countryside and meet the locals. A great introduction to rural Bhutanese life

Overnight: *Lingkhar Lodge – Cottage room (B/L/D)*

Day 05. Mar 14, 2019. Merak / Mountain Tribe

After an early breakfast, travel to one of the most remote regions of this mountain kingdom. Merak is the eastern most village of Bhutan, which has only been opened up to tourists in 2012 and is home to the semi-nomadic Brokpa tribe. En-route you will climb from 1250m (4100ft) to 3500m (11'500ft) through some incredibly scenic valleys. Photograph and enjoy a walk-through rice terraces and small villages along steep hill slopes, with spectacular Rhododendron forests in bloom. As you gain elevation, drive through mist covered, thick coniferous fir and pine tree forests, covered in lichen and mosses. Climb over a mountain pass into this remote valley with fantastic views of the snow-capped mountain peaks of the Himalayas in the distance. Arrive in Merak village at the local farm guest house in time for lunch. The people living in the Merak Sakten region are semi-nomadic yak herders with a unique and fascinating culture. They speak a different language, have their own architectural building style, pray to their own deities and wear a unique style of dress and headgear. They adorn their heads with hats made of yak-hair with five tentacles designed to draw away the rain. This afternoon explore the wonderful small village and meet the locals. The older ladies still wear their traditional yak hats and costumes. Enjoy a scenic walk up the valley surrounded by mountain peaks, yak herders and pristine forest. Upon your return, before a traditional Bhutanese dinner is served, a small cultural performance by the locals has been arranged for your enjoyment.

***Please note that this is a rustic guest house (only available accommodations), with twin sharing rooms and basic shared bathroom facilities. Showers will be in the form of a hot water bucket with a jug. A proper western toilet is available. We have arranged for a small support team to help with the logistics, cooking and bedding arrangements during our night in this remote village. Our support team is providing all the bedding sheets, blankets, pillows, mattresses and towels.*

Overnight: *Merak Farm Guest House – twin bedroom (B/L/D)*

Day 06. Mar 15, 2019. Merak / Trashigang

After an early breakfast spend some time experiencing the remote village life. Take a stroll through the countryside and village head down to *Radi*. The support team will set up a picnic lunch in a scenic location with panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and villages below. Arrive in *Radi* and be welcomed at the local nunnery by young nuns for a blessing ceremony followed by some tea. This afternoon, walk along the hill slopes through terraced rice paddies, small hamlets and watch the local farmers attending to their fields. Return to *Trashigang* for dinner and overnight at the *Lingkhar Lodge*.

Overnight: *Lingkhar Lodge – Cottage room (B/L/D)*

Day 07. Mar 16, 2019. Gomphu Kora Festival

Today experience a very special event and one of the big highlights of your Bhutan expedition, the *Gomphu Kora* festival. *Gomphu Kora* village lies in the heart of the agrarian belt of far eastern Bhutan. The story of *Gomphu Kora* goes back to the 8th century AD. Legend has it that an evil spirit named *Myongkhapa* escaped from *Samye* in Tibet when

Guru Padmasambhava, the progenitor of the *Nyingma* strand of Buddhism, was spreading the *Dharma* in the Himalayas. *Myongkhapa* followed the course of the present-day *Kholongchhu* stream and concealed himself inside a rock where *Gomphu Kora* stands today. The Guru followed the evil, meditated for three days inside the rock cave and finally vanquished the evil spirit.

The place comes alive with a grand festival once every year in spring, when people from all over eastern Bhutan descend upon the narrow valley, dressed in their finest costumes, to partake in the festivity, to worship and to reaffirm their connection with the past and present. Witness incredible masked dancers perform their traditional rituals to the tunes of ancient horns, drums and symbols. Listen to the gorgeous songs and melodies of the local dancing girls. Get lost in the hustle of the carnival where games are played and food stalls are serving momos, samosas and local beer. The Guru is attributed to have said that devotees will flock to Gomphu Kora for eons to celebrate the triumph of good over evil. There couldn't be a more accurate prophesy to this incredible festival. After the excitement of the festival, travel across winding mountain roads and steep passes to Mongar, a small town situated in the hills of eastern Bhutan. Enjoy a short stroll through town before dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: *Wangchuk Hotel – Deluxe room (B/L/D)*

Day 08. Mar 17, 2019. Mongar to Ura Valley

After breakfast take time to absorb the colors and energy of the morning market and main square before heading off further west. After a few hours of admiring the incredible landscape, we arrive at a high-altitude spruce, fir and juniper forest where we stop for a picnic lunch in a spectacular setting. Walk along a mountain stream through pristine forest, covered in lichen and moss to your lunch setting. After a sumptuous lunch, continue walking through this untouched forest wonderland. Later this afternoon, arrive at Ura valley. Located in a broad valley at over 3700m (10'000ft) Ura is the highest of the four valleys in the *Bumthang* district. The village of Ura has about 50 clusters of traditional homes and cobbled walkways, giving it a somewhat medieval atmosphere. The people of this region are primarily sheep and yak herders. Women here traditionally cover their heads with a white head scarf to protect against the cold wind and wear sheepskin behind their backs, which is used as a cushion, as well as protection from the loads they carry. Spend some time walking through the village and meeting the locals.

Our accommodation tonight will be at a local farm guest house. Our support team will have arrived here ahead of time to prepare the bedding and cooking facilities. The owner of the guest house will serve you a fresh herbal tea and introduce you to his knowledge of traditional herbal medicine. Finish off your day with a traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath infused with local herbs for your well-being.

Overnight: *Ura Farm Guest house (B/L/D)*

Day 09. Mar 18, 2019. Ura to Bumthang/ Bumthang Valley

Early departure from Ura to nearby Jakar in Bumthang valley in central eastern Bhutan. One of the most scenic regions of Bhutan, Bumthang (which literally translates to "beautiful sacred valley") has the country's highest concentration of ancient temples (29) and sacred monuments. Its history is replete with the numerous visits from *Guru Rimpoche (Padmasambhava)* as he brought the Buddha's message to Bhutan in the 8th century. He meditated in many local caves that now have temples and shrines dedicated to him.

Head to the *Tamzhing Lhundrup* Monastery. Built in 1501, it is the most important *Nyingma* *gompa* in Bhutan (old school of Mahayana Buddhism). Its temple and monastery are remarkable for their direct connection to the Bhutanese tertön (treasure discoverer and Saint), *Pema Lingpa*. Bumthang is a treasure-trove of Bhutan's art and painting traditions,

including the famous Bhutanese masks and *yathra*, which is a form of weaving unique to the area that's distinguished by unusual patterns and bright colors. Stroll around downtown and explore the *Chamkhar Bazaar* for some retail therapy before we continue our journey to the *Jakar Dzong* for great views of the surrounding villages and Bumthang valley.

Arrive at the spectacular *Amankora Bumthang*. This stunning luxury *Aman* resort property rests adjacent to the *Wandichholing Palace*. You will be greeted by your *Aman* hosts with a welcome drink and personally escorted to your beautifully appointed suite overlooking the courtyard and old palace. Join us for lunch and enjoy the wonderful resort grounds and a little siesta before meeting for a short walk around the old palace and afternoon tea. This evening you will be treated to a very special prayer ceremony with monks at the *Kharchu Dratsang* Monastery. Return to the *Aman* resort for a farewell Cocktail party followed by a special farewell dinner and overnight.

Overnight: *Amankora Bumthang – Suite (B/L/D)*

Day 10. Mar 19, 2019. Bumthang / Trongsa

Enjoy a leisurely wake up and breakfast at the resort, before we head to the oldest Buddhist temple in Bhutan, the *Jamphel Lhakhang*. It was founded by a Tibetan King in the 7th century, who was destined to build 108 temples known as *Thadhul – Yangfhu* (meaning temples on and across the border). Legend says that he built all 108 temples in one day to subdue the demoness that was residing in the Himalayas. It is said that Guru Rimpoche visited the site several times and deemed it exceptionally sacred.

From here enjoy a leisurely walk through the countryside dotted with traditional farm houses to *Kurje Lhakhang*, a 17th- century monastery, now featuring a beautiful complex of temples built in traditional style. This is the final resting place of the remains of the first three kings of Bhutan. A large tress behind one of the temple structures is believed to be a treasure (*terma*) left there by Guru Rimpoche, which represents his walking stick. Return to the *Amankora* for lunch and check out.

Travel over scenic mountain passes with incredible views of deep valleys and the Himalayan mountains. Along the way enjoy stops for photographic opportunities and to stretch your legs. Late afternoon arrive in Trongsa, situated on a steep, strategic hillslope in the heart of Bhutan. Visit the iconic Trongsa Dzong, the largest Dzong fortress in Bhutan, built on a spur overlooking the gorge of the Mangde river. A temple was first established at the location in 1543 by the Drukpa lama Ngagi Wangchuk. Today it serves not only as a monastery, but also an important administrative center for the district. Trongsa provides a strategic central location to control Bhutan and for centuries it was the seat of the Wangchuck dynasty of *penlops* (governors), who effectively ruled over most of eastern and central Bhutan, and from 1907 have been Kings of Bhutan.

Enjoy a walk through the small town and market before heading to the nearby *Yangkhil resort*, with great views of the Dzong and surrounding Black Mountain range. Dinner and overnight.

Overnight: *Yangkhil – Deluxe room (B/L/D)*

Day 11. Mar 20, 2019. Trongsa / Phobjikha

After breakfast travel along scenic mountain roads and arrive late morning at another spectacular *Aman* property called *Amankora Gantey* in the remote Phobjikha valley. Enjoy your lunch with gorgeous views across the whole valley, which is encircled by pine-covered mountains and rhododendron forests. Phobjikha valley is located in the Black Mountain National Park. This valley is most famous for being the winter abode of the endangered black-necked crane. Experts estimate that fewer than 6000 birds exist in the wild. The cranes

migrate from Tibet in mid-November and stay through to mid-March. You may be lucky enough to see a few last stragglers.

After lunch, head out to explore this beautiful and isolated alpine valley. In the center of the valley, rising dramatically from a small ridge, stands one of the oldest Nyingma Monasteries in Bhutan – *the Gangteng Goenpa*. Visit the temple and local village and enjoy a scenic downhill walk through the blue-pine forest and marshes of this glacial valley. At the black-necked crane information center watch an informative video about these endangered feathered visitors. Return to the Aman resort for a relaxing late afternoon and some free time. Enjoy tea time and cookies, a siesta, or treat yourself to a massage before dinner.

Overnight: *Amankora Gangtey – Suite (B/L/D)*

Day 12. Mar 21, 2019. Phobjikha / Punakha

Enjoy a leisurely breakfast before setting off for a morning stroll through a nearby village along the valley. Or if you're feeling more energetic, grab a mountain bike and ride through the surrounding areas. After lunch and check out, we may be lucky to come across yak herders along the surrounding mountain slopes. Witness the hard life of a yak herder and get close to yaks. Travel further west to the Sha region, famous for its Bhutanese red rice cultivation. Arrive in Punakha and be in awe of the magnificent Punakha Dzong, located at the confluence of the Mo and Po Chus (Mo translates to "mother", Po to "father", and Chus to "rivers"). Punakha served as Bhutan's capital for over 300 years. Begin your exploration with a walk around Punakha's impressive Dzong. Guarding the northern and southern approaches to Punakha Valley, this Dzong was the national capital until 1966. One of the holiest of the many Dzongs throughout Bhutan, it was built in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and contains his preserved body. Shabdrung (meaning "at whose feet one submits") was the founder and unifier of Bhutan. Since he was such a powerful leader, his attendants and advisors were very concerned about who would be selected as his successor, so his death was kept a secret for over 50 years!

The three-story main temple of the Punakha Dzong is a breath-taking example of traditional architecture with four intricately embossed entrance pillars crafted from cypress and decorated in gold and silver. Your visit here is perhaps the most important visit of any Dzong, particularly to see the incredible workmanship in the main prayer hall, which during recent years has been reconstructed following a disastrous fire and flood. Some people consider this work to be of comparable importance to that of Michelangelos in the Sistine Chapel.

Travel northwards up the Punakha valley through small villages and rice paddies to the stunning 5* *Como Uma Punakha*. This luxury boutique resort property is part of the landscape, nestled on a hillside at a bend in the Mo Chu river, with every room commanding sweeping views of the Punakha Valley and the Mo Chu as it winds its way through the rice fields and orchards. End the day with a delicious dinner at the in-house *Bukhari restaurant*, serving healthy local and international cuisine.

Overnight: *Como Uma Punakha Resort – Valley View Room (B/L/D)*

Day 13. Mar 22, 2019. Punakha

After an early breakfast, walk through the rice paddies along the Mo Chu river. Those interested can take an invigorating hike up to *Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten*. It takes about 1 ½ hours from the trailhead to the top of the hill where the temple is located. Breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and the fertile valley below away. The *chorten* itself houses hundreds of colorful images of various protector deities. Upon your return to the valley floor across the suspension bridge, we don our life jackets and helmets for an exciting but gentle raft down the Mo Chu. After 2 hours of easy river rafting, with a couple of exciting rapids along the way, a sumptuous lunch awaits in Punakha by the river

side. Return to our wonderful home for the night, the gorgeous *Como Uma resort* in time for a relaxing late afternoon and high tea served with cookies. Dinner at the resort.

Overnight: *Como Uma Punakha Resort – Valley View Room (B/L/D)*

Day 14. Mar 23, 2019. Punakha – Thimphu

After breakfast and check out, travel to Punakha and walk across the longest hanging suspension bridge of Bhutan spanning 750ft (250m) across the Po Chu river. Travel to *Chimi Lakhang* and take a short walk to this small but famous temple in the center of the Punakha Valley. Built in 1499, the yellow-roofed temple honors Lama Drukpa Kinley, the “divine madman” whose unconventional teachings and ribald exploits are spoken of by Bhutanese people to this day. The temple houses a phallic effigy of the lama’s “magic thunderbolt of wisdom,” which childless women visit to receive prayer for conception. The murals to the right of the chapel depict famous stories from Kinley’s life. Don’t be surprised to be confronted with many phallic displays not only showcased on the walls of local farm houses, but as artefacts in the village handicraft shops with various artistic interpretations, including phalluses with fangs and eyes. Travel up a steep mountain road to *Dochu la pass* at 3000m (9’000ft), where thousands of prayer flags flutter in the wind and 108 *chortens* (stupas) dot the landscape. Weather permitting, see the distant Himalayan snow-capped mountain peaks of northern Bhutan.

Head down to Thimphu, the current-day capital of Bhutan and home to the royal family. With a current population of approximately 100,000 residents, Thimphu is Bhutan’s largest city. It is the seat of the Royal Government of Bhutan, the home of the Royal Family and the main center for most international aid organizations and consulates. As the only true city in Bhutan, it is a unique mix of Himalayan and Western cultures. After lunch explore downtown Thimphu and experience the bustling market and a visit to the Zorig Chuk Sum (Institute of 13 traditional arts and crafts). Rendezvous with your leaders at the famous “*Hi Jinks Bar*” before dinner and overnight at the wonderful *Druk Hotel* in the heart of downtown Thimphu.

Overnight: *Druk Hotel – Deluxe Suite (B/L/D)*

Day 15. Mar 24, 2019. Thimphu- Paro / Deluxe Camp

After a leisurely breakfast visit the largest Buddha stature in Bhutan overlooking the Thimphu valley. This huge bronze *Dordenma* Buddha statue is gilded in gold and dedicated to everlasting happiness and enlightenment. It measures a height of 51m (169ft), making it one of the largest Buddha statues in the world. 125’000 smaller Buddha statues have been placed within the Buddha *Dordenma* stature. The throne that the Buddha sits upon is a large meditation hall. Travel north of Paro valley to *Drukgyel Dzong* and head up to a picturesque meadow in the countryside near the village of *Balakha*. Set in a gorgeous valley, Wild Earth Expeditions has arranged a deluxe camp set up overlooking a nearby hamlet surrounded by pristine forest, meadows, horses and beautiful mountain scenery. We believe this is the perfect location for our grand finale to our Bhutan expedition. This afternoon head into the pristine forest for a lovely walk, try your hand at Bhutan’s National sport archery and join the head chef for a cooking class and learn how to prepare a traditional Bhutanese dish. Relish this beautiful luxury camp setting in your own walk-in tent with comfortable cot beds, pillows, sheets and blankets, a bed side table and carpet. The main tent features a traditional Bhutanese Dragon tent with a proper sit-down dining set up. Finish your day with the opportunity to relax and unwind in a traditional Bhutanese herbal hot-stone bath under the stars.

Overnight: *Deluxe tented camp – tent (B/L/D)*

Day 16. Mar 25, 2019. Paro / Tigers Nest

Today wake up early for your big Bhutanese finale. Participate in the pilgrimage to one of the most important religious sites in the Himalayas, the *Taktsang Lhakhang*, known as the Tiger's Nest. This famous monastery clings to a vertical granite cliff 610m (2000ft) above the valley floor. The legend of *Taktsang* dates back to 747 AD when *Guru Rinpoche*, is believed to have arrived at this site on the back of a tiger and subdued the evil spirits in the region. The Guru then meditated in the holy cave which is the site of the temple today. According to Tantric Buddhist mythology, the vanquished local deities became the protectors of the Dharma and one of them, *Singye Samdrup*, is recognized today as the guardian deity of *Taktsang*. We will drive to the end of the road and begin our hike up the mountain for a closer view of the temple. The trail is steep and takes approximately 2 ½ hours. At the halfway mark, we reach a small teahouse which has a wonderful panoramic view of the temple. After a snack and some tea, we continue our climb through dense forest and prayer flags. Anyone who does not wish to hike further can relax at the teahouse and enjoy the scenic view.

Late morning, return to our deluxe campsite for a sumptuous lunch and relaxing afternoon. Enjoy a hot-stone bath to sooth your muscles after your strenuous hike. This evening, celebrate the end of your journey with a special Bhutanese farewell cocktail and dinner party
Overnight: *Deluxe tented camp – Tent (B/L/D)*

Day 17. Mar 26, 2019. Paro / Fly home OR Sagala Pass Trek Post Ext. to Haa Valley

After breakfast, head to Paro international airport for your flight back home via Bangkok, Delhi or Kathmandu.

OR if participating in the *Sagala Pass Trek - Post Extension*, start your trek across to Haa valley over Sagala pass 3700m (12'000ft). **(B)**

Day 18. Mar 27, 2019. Arrive Home



POST EXTENSION ITINERARY

SAGALA PASS TREK

Day 17. Mar 26, 2019. Trek from Paro Valley to Sagala Pass Camp

After breakfast, bid farewell to those not participating in the *Sagala Pass Trek Post-Extension* and load up the mules with all your gear that you need for the 2-day trek and overnight camping. To experience the beautiful nature of western Bhutan nothing compares to the Sagala pass hike and recently opened Haa valley.

Start your trek to the end of the valley across farm land and blue pine pastures, to a gorgeous mountain stream set in the midst of a coniferous forest. From here start your climb up a steep trail through old growth forest of spruce, hemlock and rhododendron. Upon arrival at the Sagala pass mountain top at 3700m (12'000ft) you will enjoy breathtaking views of Bhutan's northern Himalayas including *Mt. Jhomolhari* and *Jichudarkey*. On top of the pass, a hot picnic lunch will be served. Stroll across mountain meadows and through pristine alpine forest to our camp site. The camp site on a meadow will already be set up prior to your arrival (including tents with mattress, pillow, sleeping bag and towel) and a main tent for dining.

Settle at the camp site and enjoy some refreshments. We are sharing the same meadow with yak herders. Join your leader for a visit to the yak herders hut to witness and photograph the daily life of these nomadic herdsman. Watch them feeding the yaks, bringing in the yak calves for the night and for those adventurous enough enjoy a cup of yak butter tea and some yak cheese (a rather acquired taste). This is a very unique experience to witness the hardship and simple life of these mountain people. Return to camp where you will be treated to a huge bonfire and a wonderful dinner under the stars. Fall asleep to the soothing sound of the nearby stream and gentle whistle of wind blowing through the pine trees.

Overnight: *Yak meadow camp – Tent (twin tent) (B/L/D)*

Day 18. Mar 27, 2019. Trek - Camp to Haa Valley / Paro

After breakfast watch the yak herders milk the yaks before descending through the meadows and forests down to quaint villages located in the upper Haa valley. The bus will pick you up at the remote village of *Talung* and drop you at the nearby temple of *Jamtok Gompa*. From here take your final descent through picturesque forest with great mountain views to the valley floor where a beautiful picnic lunch will be set up at the river on your arrival. After lunch drive through Haa town, visit the temple and local market and drive up the *Chelela* pass back to Paro valley. Spend your last night in Bhutan at the wonderful 5* *Zhiwa Ling Hotel*. Farewell Dinner and overnight.

Overnight: *Zhiwa Ling Hotel – Junior Cottage Suite (B/L/D)*

Day 19. Mar 28, 2019. Paro / Fly Home via Bangkok

After breakfast, head to Paro international airport for your flight back home. (B)

Day 20. Mar 29, 2019. Arrive home

WHAT TO EXPECT

All *Wild Earth Expeditions* are very active and participants need to be in good general health. For most activities, a moderate level of fitness is required and the walks are casual and easy. The only exception is the Tiger's Nest hike (which is a steep 2 ½ hr hike) and the *Sagala Pass Trek Post-Extension*, which is a 2-day trek, designed only for the fit and those used to hiking at altitude. Many of the Dzongs have steps and you may at times be walking over rugged uneven ground. You will travel in a comfortable a/c bus on windy mountain roads. Accommodations we have chosen, range from top-end luxury resort properties with a/c, hot water and ensuite bathroom facilities, to very deluxe camping in Paro valley (which takes the team a week to set up), to simple guest houses in remote Merak (1-night) and Ura (1-night). The *Sagala Pass Trek Post Extension* includes 1-night camping (with tent/mattress/pillows/sleeping bag/towel and main dining tent included). Whilst we have a great support team preparing the camp sites and guest houses on our behalf, the sites are still in very remote areas, so you will not have the usual home comforts and washing/toilet facilities will be simple during those couple of days. Detailed Pre-departure information will be sent to you 4 months prior to the expedition. Your expedition will be led by 2 Wild Earth Expeditions leaders including Founder/Director Natalia Baechtold, our fabulous Bhutanese lead guide Tshering Dorji and the best local guides and camp staff to ensure you get the a truly authentic experience.

PLEASE NOTE

Please note that this expedition is a trip combination of 2 expeditions, the “*Eastern Bhutan Gomphu Kora Festival and Mountain tribes*” and “*Bhutan – The Hidden Shangri-la Kingdom*”. When combining these 2 trips for the ‘Best of Bhutan’ expedition you will receive a **USD \$ 3000 per person trip combo savings.**

ITINERARY

Wild Earth Expeditions will make every reasonable effort to operate the expedition as advertised, but alterations may occur, usually due to weather or flight schedule changes. We will discuss our planned itinerary daily with our local expert guides and will always choose the best available option. Accommodations and arranged tours are subject to change or cancellation at any time due to unforeseen circumstances or circumstances beyond *Wild Earth Expeditions* control. Despite all our good intentions and utmost preparation, Mother Nature may not always cooperate with us. Please note that 2019 flight schedules and airfares will only be released 11 months prior to the end of the expedition.



COST & INFO

BEST OF BHUTAN - COMBO SAVINGS

Combine Eastern Bhutan and Bhutan Shangri-La and receive a **USD \$3000 per person Trip Combo Savings** on the below prices.

EASTERN BHUTAN - Gomphu Kora Festival & Mountain Tribes

Double Occupancy: USD \$9,200 per person

Single Supplement Surcharge: USD \$3,890 per person

BHUTAN – The Hidden Shangri-La Kingdom

Double Occupancy: USD \$11,990 per person

Single Supplement Surcharge: USD \$3,960 per person

POST EXTENSION – Sagala Pass Trek

Double Occupancy: USD \$1,770 per person

Single Supplement Surcharge: USD \$180 per person

INCLUDED

\$250 per person per day Bhutan visa fee (USD\$4500); All accommodations in twin/double share rooms or tents as outlined in the itinerary; All group meals; Welcome and farewell cocktail receptions; Soft drinks, drinking water, tea and regular filter coffee during meals at all hotels and accommodations; All group transfers and baggage handling; All tours, excursions, activities as outlined in the itinerary; Exclusive services of English speaking professional guides; Services of 2 Wild Earth Expedition Leaders; All gratuities to porters, guides, drivers, resort- and wait staff; Government- Service- and Room taxes; All permits, Entrance fees; Complimentary slideshow and photos; Donations to local project.

NOT INCLUDED

All international and domestic airfares (**see below flight details*); Any airport arrival and departure taxes; Passport fees; Immunization costs; Meals outside the group travel itinerary; Mandatory Travel insurance (including medical, medical evacuation and accident); Excess baggage charges; Personal items, such as laundry, any alcoholic beverages or bar charges (unless specified above), WiFi, telephone, fax calls; Tips for your 2 Wild Earth Leaders and any non-group services. Any sudden increase in price, due to currency fluctuations, a steep hike in fuel cost, change in government tax policy or for any reason beyond our control, will be adjusted with the final invoice due 4 months prior to the expedition.

SINGLE OCCUPANCY

Single spaces are limited, and single occupancy rates apply. If you are wanting to share accommodations, a roommate will be assigned to you in which case the double occupancy rates apply. If we cannot pair you with a roommate, the single supplement surcharge applies.