

## 2019 EASTERN BHUTAN

GOMPHU KORA FESTIVAL & MOUNTAIN TRIBES



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10 – 21 MAR 2019 • 12 DAYS • 12 GUESTS

Join us for an enlightening journey through one of the last remaining Buddhist Kingdom's and the least explored corners of Bhutan. Long shut off from the rest of the world, Eastern 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 Eastern 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. Journey to remote villages with superb mountain vistas to meet mountain tribes and ethnic minorities. Experience pure happiness, a quality Bhutanese culture has obtained through carefully-preserved traditional lifestyle. Explore temples decorated with exquisite and flamboyant designs and experience the simple living of the Yak herders. 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.

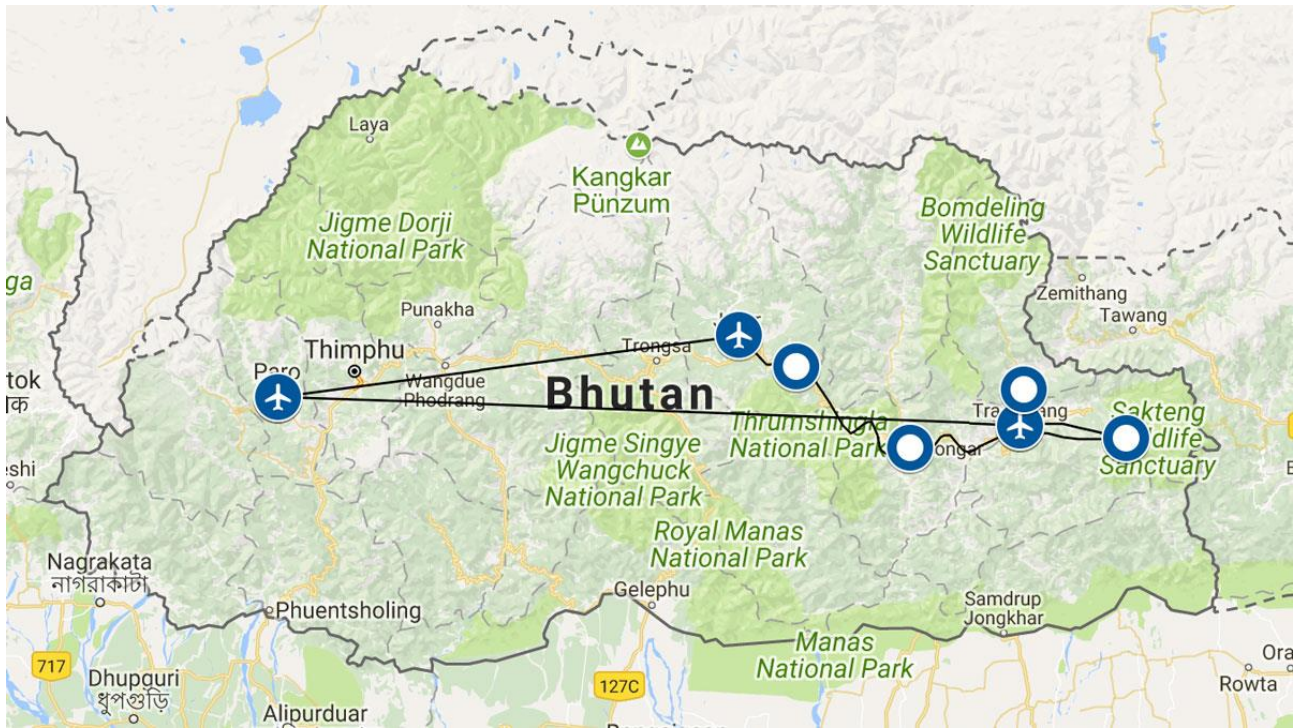
### HIGHLIGHTS

- Travel through mystical landscapes with glorious mountain passes and peaks.
- Be moved by the colorful *Gomphu Kora* festival.
- Experience authentic Bhutanese living and genuine hospitality.
- Visit ancient fortresses, sacred monasteries and remote temples.
- Engage with mountain tribes and Yak herders.
- Walk through lush valleys with rushing rivers and superb mountain vistas.

### 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

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	Bhumtang valley / Amankora Bhumtang
Day 11   Mar 20	Fly to Paro / Zhiwaling Hotel Paro
Day 12   Mar 21	Fly home



## ITINERARY

### EASTERN BHUTAN - GOMPHU KORA FESTIVAL & MOUNTAIN TRIBES

#### **Day 01. Mar 10, 2019. Depart Home / En-Route to Paro, Bhutan**

Depart home and fly to either Bangkok, Delhi or Kathmandu en route to Paro, Bhutan. Arrive into Bangkok or Delhi the night before, 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> century fortress towering over the valley of Paro, like most Dzongs, it houses 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 rural village ceremony / Cultural experience**

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 04. 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 05. Mar 15, 2019. Merak / Radi Rice Terraces and Nunnery / 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 06. 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 *Kholongchu* 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 prophecy 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 07. 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 08. Mar 18, 2019. Ura to Bumthang/ Explore 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 8<sup>th</sup> century. He meditated in many local caves that now have temples and shrines dedicated to him.

On arrival into Bhumtang, meet the in-coming group (only doing '[BHUTAN – The Hidden Shangri-La Kingdom](#)' expedition) and head to *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 09. Mar 18, 2019. Bumthang Valley / Amankora Bhumtang**

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 7<sup>th</sup> century, who was destined to build 108 temples known as *Thadhul – Yangfhul* (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 17<sup>th</sup>- 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. Bid farewell to your leaders and those continuing on with the “Bhutan – Shangri-la” expedition. Later this afternoon, take a stroll around the picturesque area or explore a little more of Bhumtang or simply relax and enjoy the facilities of this stunning hotel before dinner.

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

#### **Day 10. Mar 20, 2019. Fly from Bumthang to Paro / Paro**

After breakfast head to the nearby airport for your short, but very scenic flight to Paro. Check-in at the 5\* *Zhiwaling Hotel* and take the opportunity to explore Paro, complete some last-minute shopping or simply relax and enjoy a hot stone bath before dinner.

**Overnight:** *Zhiwaling – Suite (B/L/D)*

#### **Day 11. Mar 21, 2019. Depart and flight home**

After breakfast transfer to the airport for your international flight home via Bangkok or Delhi (B)

#### **Day 12. Mar 22, 2019. Arrive home**

### **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.



## COST & INFO

### **EASTERN BHUTAN - Gomphu Kora Festival & Mountain Tribes**

Double Occupancy: USD \$9,200 per person

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

### **BEST OF BHUTAN COMBO – Bhutan & Eastern Bhutan**

Combine with [‘BHUTAN – The Hidden Shangri-La Kingdom’](#) expedition and receive a **USD \$3000 per person Trip Combo Savings** on the BEST OF BHUTAN expedition.

### **INCLUDED**

\$250 per person per day Bhutan visa fee; All accommodations in twin/double share rooms 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; 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 on this expedition 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.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT**

All *Wild Earth Expeditions* are very active and participants need to be in good general health. For most activities, a moderate to good level of fitness is required. This expedition involves some walking on rugged uneven landscapes at altitude and staying in simple lodgings. Accommodations we have chosen are the best available in the remote areas, and in some cases, they are quite rustic and have shared bathroom facilities. For the 2 nights at the Merak and Ura Farm Guest houses, we only have twin sharing rooms and basic shared



bathroom facilities available. 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 support team and they will be providing all the bedding sheets, blankets, pillows, mattresses and towels. In contrast, the accommodation in Paro and Bumthang will be luxurious and 5\*, renowned for quality and high standards so please be prepared for the 2 nights of contrasting rustic but very traditional accommodations in Merak and Ura.

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 and our fabulous Bhutanese lead guide Tshering Dorji and the best local guides and camp staff to ensure a truly authentic and unforgettable experience.