

Expedition Muse

BHUTAN: THE KINGDOM OF THE THUNDER DRAGON

11-Day Private Expedition | December 2026

TOUR SUMMARY

Duration:

11 days/10 nights

Dates:

7 to 17 December 2026

Group:

6 people

Accommodation:

A mix of luxury 4- and 5-star accommodation (with one 3-star heritage lodge)

HIGHLIGHTS

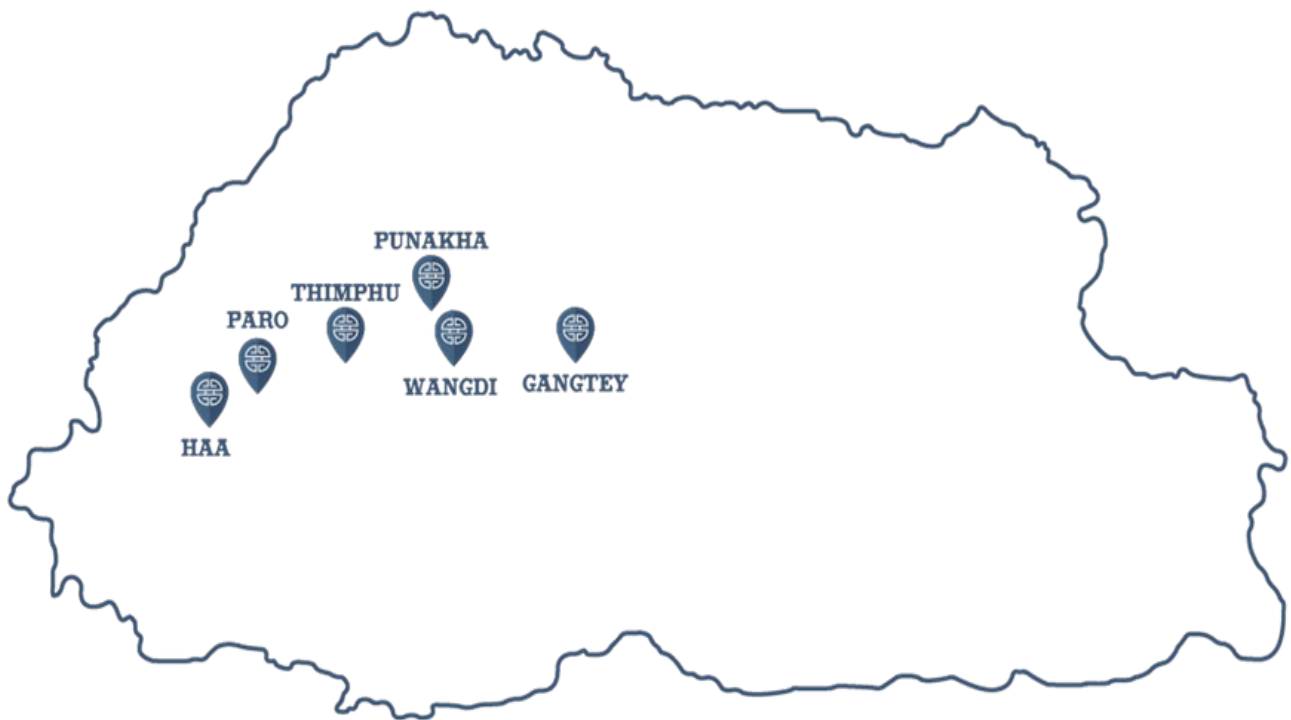
Gangtey: Visit a beautiful, protected valley where you can get a taste of rural Bhutanese life

Festival: Attend the Druk Wangyel festival to experience masked dancing and spiritual ceremonies

Haa: Cross the highest motorable pass in Bhutan at 3800m and then descend to the remote Haa valley little visited by tourists

Paro: Hike to the famous Tiger's Nest monastery that clings to sheer cliffs over the Paro valley, the highlight of any trip to Bhutan!

Your Travel Journey Through BHUTAN



Paro > Thimphu > Punakha > Gangtey >
Wangdi > Paro > Haa > Paro



DAY 1/ Monday 7 December

Arrive at Paro International Airport. Paro is situated in a beautiful valley at 2280 metres and is a fitting introduction to this charming kingdom. Your guide will meet you and take you on a short one-hour drive along the Paro and Thimphu river valleys to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital, at 2320 metres.

Stop on the way to take in the magnificent Tamchhog Lhakhang, the hereditary place of worship for Bhutan's iron bridge builder

Sightseeing today depends on flight timing.

Take a late afternoon walk around town and soak in the atmosphere of this magical capital with its busy shops and bazaars and photogenic citizens in national dress. If there is time, we will walk down to visit the farmers market where farmers display their vegetables and other products.

Overnight in Thimphu



DAY 2/ Tuesday 8 December

In the morning visit the huge statue of Buddha Dordenma, which commands a tremendous view of Thimphu valley. The impressive 3-storey throne holds several chapels and the body itself is filled with 125,000 smaller statues of Buddha.

And then drive about 25 minutes to Sangaygang (Radio Tower) where you will walk for about 1 hour to Druk Wangditse temple which overlooks the whole Thimphu valley. Druk Wangditse Lhakhang is one of the oldest temples in Thimphu, and considered an important heritage site of Bhutan.

Here we will arrange a sound bath session with Yangchen Lhamo, widely known as Yoga Yangchen, a yoga and meditation teacher, sound healer, and animal rights advocate. A sound bath (or gong bath) is a deeply relaxing meditative experience where the soothing vibrations and resonant tones of gongs help calm the mind, reduce stress and promote a sense of inner balance while participants rest comfortably (TBC).

After visiting the temple walk back to Sangaygang (Radio Tower) and then visit the Takin Reserve showcasing the unique national animal, the Takin.

Estimated distance and hiking time: (2.5 km, 1.5 hours)

Starting elevation – 2670 metres

Highest elevation – 2670 metres

Ending elevation – 2430 metres

In the afternoon we will arrange for you to experience a demonstration class on weaving and the natural dyeing process at a local family's home where they use madder, onion skins, seasonal flowers and other natural materials to dye silk threads. Try the traditional refreshments and snacks and tie-dye a handkerchief using the natural dyes to take home with you. You can also take some photos wearing the family's antique Kiras and Ghos.

Later, if you would like to view or buy Bhutanese handicrafts, walk through the Craft Bazaar which has an array of stalls run by local handicraft shops selling purely home-made articles with no imports.

Overnight in Thimphu

DAY3/ Wednesday9December

Thimphu to Punakha. In the morning we drive approximately 3 hours to the old capital, Punakha, via Dochu La pass at 3050 metres, where we will stop and enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalaya ranges. You will notice the change of climate and vegetation as we approach low-lying Punakha at 1250 metres.

On the way visit Chimi Lhakhang (Temple of Fertility) built in the 15th century by the 'Divine Madman' (Lama Drukpa Kuenley) and set amongst terraced fields in the village of Sopsokha.

This afternoon (just above one of the longest suspension bridges in Bhutan) we will arrange lunch at Punakha Heritage homestay where they will guide you through an engaging Bhutanese cooking class where you will learn to prepare traditional dishes using authentic techniques and ingredients. Here you can also try your hand at traditional sports like archery, khuru (darts) or degor.

Then visit the imposing Punakha Dzong, "Palace of Great Happiness". Built in 1637, it is strategically placed at the confluence of two rivers, the Po Chu and the Mo Chu.

Overnight in Punakha



DAY 4/ Thursday 10 December

Pho Chu hike (*maleriverhike*). In the morning we will drive about 10 minutes to the cremation ground just behind Punakha Dzong where you will set off on your hike which takes you into a side valley which follows the course of the Pho Chu river and is little visited. After a few minutes' walk you will reach one of the longest suspension bridges in Bhutan, which you can walk across.

From the bridge you will take a left turn and climb up for about 15 minutes and from there you have a gentle walk for about two hours through Chir Pine forest on an ancient trail which passes through ruins. You can enjoy some lovely views of hamlets, isolated houses and the occasional temple and you will hear the river gushing below. The hike ends at the village of Samdingkha where you will be picked up by your car. On the way back, if there is time you can visit an old temple called Ngya (or Meaaneag) Lhakhang.

Estimated distance and hiking time: (8 km, 2.5 hours)

Starting elevation – 1250 metres

Highest elevation – 1370 metres

Ending elevation – 1270 metres

This afternoon enjoy a picnic lunch by the riverside with a view of the beautiful Punakha Dzong.

Then visit Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Nunnery. The nunnery has one of the biggest bronze statues of Avalokiteshvara - a bodhisattva embodying infinite compassion - created entirely by local Bhutanese artisans. The temple complex also houses a permanent higher learning and meditation centre for nuns, for both religious training and life skills. *Here you may be able to join nuns in their evening prayers.*

Overnight in Punakha



DAY 5/ Friday 11 December

Drive approximately 3 hours to Gangtey at 2900 metres. Enjoy the views of the immense and remote Phobjikha valley and the black mountain ranges.

Visit Gangtey Gumpa, one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries. From here, take the short Gangtey Nature Trail through the Phobjikha valley and explore the valley where the villagers continue to live a traditional Bhutanese rural lifestyle.

Estimated distance and hiking time: (4 km, 1.5 hours)

Starting elevation: 3030 metres

Highest elevation: 3030 metres

Ending elevation: 2840 metres

This is the site where black-necked cranes visit in their hundreds in November each year after spending the summer in Tibet and you should be able to catch sight of these beautiful, rare and endangered birds in their winter habitat.

Unwind with a spiritual talk with the Trulku at Gangtey Shedra.

Overnight in Gangtey



DAY 6/ Saturday 12 December

Enjoy the scenic Longtey hike today. It is a 30-minute drive from Phobjikha to the starting point in Longtey village on the East-West highway. Start by walking downwards following the path to the right of the road. The path will lead through bush bamboo towards a small cluster of village houses. There are beautifully coloured rhododendron forests on both sides of the valley and in the winter months yaks graze in the area. Continue up through the village until you reach the start of mystifying old-growth rhododendron forest.

We climb up gradually through the thickets of dwarf bamboos, birch, rhododendron, hemlock and fir. The last part of the hike through the forest is slightly steeper uphill until you reach Kayche La (at 3640m), which is marked with some prayer flags. Here at the pass, you will have impressive views of the Gangtey Shedra (*university*), Gangtey Gumpa and the rest of the valley down below.

Continue along the path as it slopes along the ridge, keeping the Kumbu Tshamkhang (meditation huts) and Kumbu Lhakhang (temple) on the left. From here it is all downhill through the long and beautiful stretch of meadows and farms. It is possible to get picked up by your car from here or you may continue down to the Shedra or all the way down to the valley.

Estimated distance and hiking time: (7 km, 4 hours)

Starting elevation – 3160 metres

Highest elevation – 3700 metres

Ending elevation – 3170 metres

Afterwards visit the Black-Necked Crane Information Centre, which has lots of information on the valley and its famous migrating birds.

Overnight in Gangtey

DAY 7/ Sunday 13 December

Early this morning drive approximately 3 hours to Dochu La.



Visit the Druk Wangyel Lhakhang Festival which takes place at Dochu La Pass, one of the most scenic locations in the entire kingdom offering a stunning panoramic view of the Himalayan mountain range.

Set amidst this breath-taking backdrop, the Dochula Druk Wangyel Tshechu is an experience unlike any other and truly exemplifies Bhutanese cultural traditions. The Druk Wangyel Lhakhang was built over a period of four years (2004-2008) under the vision and patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo. The Lhakhang honours the courageous service of the Fourth King, who personally led the troops against the insurgents, as well as the regular Armed Forces of the country.

After the festival continue to Paro, a drive of approximately 2 hours.

End the day with a memorable dinner at a traditional Bhutanese farmhouse accompanied by an authentic cultural performance.

Overnight in Paro

DAY 8/ Monday 14 December

Today we will drive about 2 hours to Haa at 2670 metres crossing the Chele La pass at 3800m from where you will have a view of Mount Jomolhari to the north as well as down to the Haa valley. First, we will stop to visit Kila Gompa, a nunnery inhabited by about 30 nuns who live a life of contemplation and seclusion with daily prayer and spiritual practice. The community is one of the oldest of seven nunneries in Bhutan and was initially established in the early 9th century as a meditation site. The main temple houses ancient statues of Chenrezig and Guru Rinpoche among others. After visiting the nunnery, you can follow an old trail for about an hour and a half uphill through rhododendron and hemlock forest towards Chele La pass where your vehicle will be waiting for you.

Estimated distance and hiking time: (2.5 km, 3.3 hours)

Starting elevation – 3630 metres

Highest elevation – 3840 metres

Ending elevation – 3800 metres

Then continue your drive down into Haa town. Haa is little visited by tourists and the town is still very small – as yet there are only one or two basic restaurants and local heritage lodges and no tourist hotels, so the area remains quite remote. A great opportunity to view this beautiful rural scene.

Walk around Haa town and visit Lhakhang Karpo (White Temple) which is associated with the introduction of Buddhism in the region. It is considered a sacred site and is famous for its historical and spiritual significance. The temple's name, "Karpo," meaning "white," reflects its importance as a symbol of purity and protection. You can also visit Lhakhang Nagpo (Black Temple) which is situated nearby and is often visited together with Lhakhang Karpo. It is called "Nagpo" (black) because it is believed to have been constructed to balance the energy of the region. Both temples are significant in Bhutanese culture and are dedicated to local deities.

Overnight in Haa



DAY 9/ Tuesday 15 December

From Haa town, we drive about 25 minutes to Katsho Gumpa, a small but important Buddhist monastery located in the Haa Valley. The gumpa, also known as Katsho Lhakhang, is set amidst the beautiful and serene surroundings of Haa Valley, a region known for its peaceful atmosphere and stunning natural beauty.

Next, we can hike towards Juneydrak Hermitage, a cliff-side retreat which contains a footprint of Machen Labdrom (1055 -1132), a female Tibetan tantric practitioner. From Katso Gumpa, hike steeply up for about 20 minutes, then after a short flat section descend steeply for around 15 minutes until you reach the chorten that marks the entry to the hermitage. From here there is a set of steep stairs up to the temple. If there is no one meditating inside the temple, then you can go in and take a look at the footprint. If monks are meditating in the hermitage, you will not be able to go in, but it is a lovely walk, and there is a beautiful view back towards Haa Valley from the temple. It takes around 30 minutes for the steep descent from the temple back to the spot where your driver will be waiting to drive back to Paro.

Estimated distance and hiking time: (2.5 km, 1.5 hours)

Starting elevation – 3055 metres

Highest elevation – 3100 metres

Ending elevation – 2910 metres

Once back in Paro we will visit the impressive Paro Rinpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture. [*Here you can offer some butter lamps for future good health \(to purchase butter lamps on the spot\).*](#)

Afterwards, visit the Phurba Mandala Display Centre to view their art show gallery and the artists making sand mandalas. [*Here you can try making sand mandalas and painting Thangkas.*](#)

Overnight in Paro

DAY 10/ Wednesday 16 December



Early in the morning, take a walk to the 'Tiger's Nest,' the sacred Taktshang Monastery, which clings to the rock face 900 meters above the valley floor.

First, we drive for about 20 to 45 minutes (depending on where you are staying) to the car park, where your hike to Tiger's Nest begins. From the car park to the cafeteria, the walk takes about 1.5 to 2 hours. The cafeteria offers a spectacular view of the monastery and you can enjoy a cup of tea if you wish.

From here, you will have the option to continue up to the monastery, which will take another 1.5 to 2 hours.

Tiger's Nest is one of the most sacred places for Bhutanese people and is a highlight for many visitors. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site riding on a tigress, and he subsequently meditated there for three months. It is one of Bhutan's most holy sites, attracting pilgrims not only from Bhutan but also from neighbouring Buddhist countries.

After visiting the monastery, descend to the car park (which will take about 2 to 3 hours) and then we will drive to town for a late lunch. If your walk takes longer, you can have lunch at the cafeteria on your way down.

Estimated distance and hiking time: (6.5 km, 5 to 6 hours)

Starting elevation – 2605 metres

Highest elevation – 3155 metres

Ending elevation – 2605 metres

Later take a stroll around Paro town and visit some handicraft shops for souvenirs of your trip.

Experience a special forest and fortress dinner under the stars amidst the pine forest and overlooking the historic Drukgyel Dzong.

Overnight in Paro

DAY11/ Thursday 17 December

Early in the morning, your guide will accompany you to the airport to see you off onto your flight and wish you Tashi Delek (goodbye and good luck).



PRIVATE INQUIRIES & RESERVATIONS

To preserve an intimate experience, group size for the Bhutan Expedition is strictly limited to 6 guests. For full investment details, suite availability, and bespoke arrangements, please visit expeditionmuse.com or contact the expedition director.

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Note: Invoices, bank transfer details, and payment receipts for this expedition will reflect our fulfillment partner, Memories Travel Club.

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