

JAN Treks & Travels

Journeys into Adventure and Nature

Merak - Sakten Trek – 12 days/7 day trekking

Explore the unknown East of Bhutan

Tour JTT-BT02: Guwahati – Samdrup Jonkhar - Donmong Chu - Merek - Jornkhar Teng - Guwahati

Trekking through the easternmost national park of Bhutan we'll encounter the unique culture of the Brogpa herders. In spring time they migrate to high pastures with their yaks, sheep, cows and horses. We'll follow them there, enjoying the multitude of shades of pink and red of the flowering rhododendron trees (spring time only) and magnificent vistas of the Himalayas.

Itinerary

Day 01: Guwahati – Samdrup Jonkhar

Your guide will be at your hotel to greet you, after completion of refreshment and custom formalities, will visit the Zangdopelri Monastery at Samdrup Jongkhar. Dinner and overnight at hotel in Bhutan.

Day 02: Samdrup Jongkhar – Trashigang

After an early breakfast, we will drive north to Trashigang. As the road ascends, we pass through a variety of vegetation zones in the Himalayan foothills. Looking back we should get a distant view of the Indian plains. Heading further north, the road is so high that we may be above the clouds! The roadside is rich in plants including ferns, rhododendrons and primulas.

Late in the afternoon, we will visit Trashigang Dzong which houses the monastic institute for monks and administrative center for the valley. Dinner and overnight at hotel in Trashigang.



Day 3: Trashigang/Chaling – Donmong Chu (approx.19km, 7 ½ hours, 2217m ascend and 230m descend)

From Trashigang, drive for 1½ hr. to the road end at Chaling at 2148m. After leaving Trashigang, the drive is a scenic one as you pass through Rangjung town and then after that, it is a dirt road through Radhi village to Chaling. Here the trek starts.

Please note: on trekking days, you will only be responsible for your day bag only. The bulk of your items will be carried by horses.

The trek you're embarking on is moderately strenuous. The maximum elevation you will reach is at the Nachu-La Mountain Pass: 4153m.

After the pack animals are loaded with your luggage, begin trek past Chaling and gradually make a climb towards Shaktimi meadow, with yaks and sheep grazing with some yak herders' huts scattered on the hill side. Continue the climb to reach Mendu-La Pass at 3354m. After the mountain pass, it is all downhill through the rhododendron forests until campsite at a beautiful meadow at Donmong chu by the river at 3124m. Overnight at camp.

**Day 4: Donmong Chu – Merak
(approx.14km, 5hours, 396m ascend)**

Trek along the Donmong Chu through the rhododendron forests and shrubs. There are no steep climbs today and the trail in most part follows the river bends, gradually gaining the height. The first village we come across is Gangu and after another 45 minutes, we arrive at Merak village located at an altitude of 3520m. Visit the local village homes; meet with its local people.

South of Sakteng, the nomadic enclave of Merak is one of the most isolated valleys in Bhutan. Like the people of Sakteng, Merak people (Brokpas) are said to have migrated here few centuries ago from Tshona region of southern Tibet. They arrived here after several months of journey across treacherous passes, set the shrubs on fire and settled down to make it their home called Merak, which literally means “Set on fire”. The inhabitants of Merak are similar to those of Sakteng in their language, dress, lifestyle and spiritual affiliation; however the people from Merak are said to be better built and taller than their counter part in Sakteng. The houses are built of stones with very small windows and in most cases the houses are one storied only. In Merak, the custom of polyandry is practiced, with brothers sharing the same wife. Overnight in Camp.



Day 5: Merak – Miksateng (approx. 16km, 5hours, 633m ascend and 1074m descend)

Today’s journey is the toughest on this trek with crossing of the highest pass of this trek and there are also few smaller passes and ridges. Start early from the camp, towards the east with a gradual climb to the first pass at 3900m, from where you can look back for a last glimpse of Merak valley. Continue thereafter along the tree line with juniper and rhododendron forest on one side until we reach Nachung-La mountain Pass at 4153m. Then, we descend down to Miksateng village Campsite at 3079m. Overnight at camp.

Day 6: Miksateng – Sakteng (approx. 14km, 5hours, 81ascend and 310m descent)

After breakfast, drop down to the river and after crossing it, we follow the river basin for few hours. Than we gradually make a climb towards a small pass with a small stupa or chorten on the hill overlooking the Sakteng valley. From the ridge we drop down to the valley and camp in a meadow by the river side in Sakteng at an altitude of 2950m. Overnight at camp.

Day 7: Sakteng Exploration

Rest Day to explore the valley and cultural program in the evening.

In the morning visit, one or two of the villages and experience the lifestyle and unique living culture of this ethnic group. You can also visit a primary school. In the afternoon witness cultural program performed by the locals, their unique yak dance and ache lhamo dance. Located north of Merak, Sakten is a wide valley at around 3000m, surrounded by mountains on all sides. Sakteng literally means bamboo field. The inhabitants of Sakteng are similar to those of Merak in their language, dress, lifestyle and spiritual afflictions. It comprises of around 250 household with three main villages, Sakteng, Tengma and Borang Tse but generally known as Sakteng, and the people are known as Saktengpa. Every winter, Brokpas take on Drukkor or grain journey to the lowland village where they have their regular host family, with whom they have close trading and social relationship. They live together as one family for weeks and barter their Yak products with maize and grains.

Overnight in camp.

Day 8: Sakteng – Joenkhar Teng (approx. 17km, 7hours, 74m ascend and 1291m descent)



Today's journey will be a longer and so we will start early from the camp. Leaving Sakteng, start with short climb to the small hill towards the west end of the village. Then, descend down to the river and walk alongside it through the broad leaf forests. We camp in a beautiful meadow near the river by Joenkhar Teng village (1733m). Joenkharteng is situated on the hillside and its population comprises of Brokpa and Sharchoipa with a community

school and an outreach clinic.

Overnight at camp.

Day 9: Joenkhar teng – Phongmey/Trashigang (approx.12km, 5 ½ hours, 346m ascend and 942m descent)

Our last day of the trek begins with short climb through the Joenkhar Teng. Cross few of suspension bridges and short climbs to reach Phongmay. Meet our transport and drive to Trashigang and overnight in the hotel.

Day 10 – Trashigang – Day Excursion to Trashi Yangtse

Today we will drive to Trashi Yangtse along the way, we'll reach Gom Kora and pass a luxuriant waterfall. We'll stop here to visit the Gom Kora Monastery, which was founded in the 8th century, by Guru Rimpoche.

We will then continue our drive until we reach Chorten Kora, built in the 1700's and considered to be the largest chorten in Bhutan. We'll then head into the valley of Trashi

Yangtse where the locals are very famous for their woodwork. A picnic lunch will be served en-route.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

Day 11 – Trashigang – Samdrup Jongkhar

We will drive south to Samdrup Jongkhar. As the road descends, we pass through a variety of vegetation zones in the Himalayan foothills. The roadside is rich in plants including ferns, rhododendrons and primulas.

Time permitting, we'll visit the Zangdopelri Monastery at Samdrup Jongkhar. Dinner and overnight at a local hotel, your last night in Bhutan.

Day 12: Samdrup Jongkhar - Guwahati

After breakfast in the hotel, Indian drivers will pick you up to take you to Guwahati or any other onward destination.

Price: USD 250 per day (high season: March, April, May, Sept, Oct. Nov) or USD 200 (low season: Dec, Jan, Feb, June, July & Aug), all-inclusive. USD 40 surcharge per day for individual travelers, USD 30 per day for parties of two. Travel from and to India not included. Please ask for quotation.