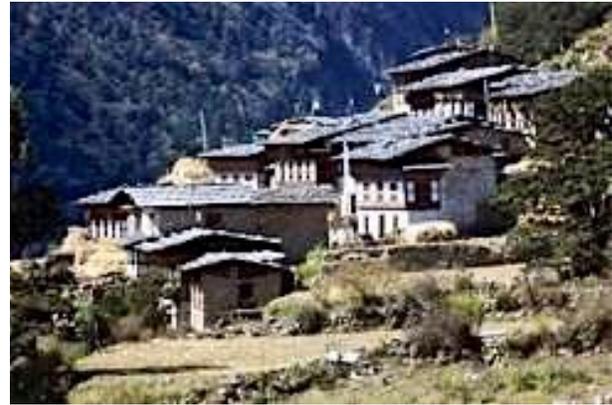




Rodang La Trek – 17 days/9 days trek

Tour JTT-BT04: Paro – Thimpu – Punakha - Bumthang - Khaine Lakhang - Menji – Tashi Yangtse - Trashigang – Samdrup Jongkar - Guwahati

The trail over Rodang La trek is a very rewarding trek through a rarely visited part of the country. This route was the most important trade route to eastern Bhutan till the road was built. Nowadays hardly anybody, except some ardent trekkers, travels along this route anymore. That is: not the full length of it. But on the way, you'll meet herders and farmers living in isolated hamlets where time has not moved much, recently.



The route can also be seen as an extension of the Snowman Trek ending in Bumthang. The combination of the two of them, Snowman and Rodung La trek, connects the country from the west (Paro) to the far East (Trashi Yangtse). Although the trek does not lead into really high altitude, it is tough and involves long steep descents or ascents; depending on the side you start the trek. Definitely one of the harder treks in Bhutan!

Standard: Medium to hard

Best Seasons: October to early November and April to early May

Start: Toktu Zampa (Bumthang) Finish: Trashi Yangtse

Itinerary

Day 01: Delhi – Paro

On a clear day, the Druk Air the flight to Bhutan provides wonderful views of the Himalayas. On arrival at Paro Airport (2250m), after immigration and customs formalities our guide will meet you outside the Airport.

After a refreshment at the hotel, we drive up to Rinpung Dzong situated at a commanding height and overlooking Paro Valley. This Dzong is symbolic as the religious and secular center of all affairs of the Paro district. Time permitting, we visit the the Ta-Dzong. Originaly this was the watch tower of Paro Dzong. Since 1968, it houses the National Museum. The collection includes ancient Bhutanese art and artifacts, weapons and countries, as well as exquisite postage stamps.

After lunch, we will hike up to the famous 17th century temple called Taktsang or the Tigers nest. Perched on a rock face 900 meters above Paro valley, this little monastery is one of the absolute highlights of Bhutan.

In 8th century, Guru Rinpoche, the great Indian saint who brought Buddhism to Bhutan, is believed to have arrived here flying on the back of a tigress and have meditated here for about three months. It is revered as one of the most sacred places, every Bhutanese wish to visit this place at least once in their lifetime.

To get there, it takes about two hours of uphill walk. There is a cafe half way up where there are spectacular views of the monastery. The trail to the monastery climbs through beautiful pine forest, many of the trees festooned with Spanish moss, and an occasional grove of fluttering prayer flags. We will have time at the monastery to view the many temples there and to enjoy the view. For many, to see the iconic Tiger's Nest in person, might be the pinnacle of the entire trip.

Overnight at Paro.

Day 02: Paro – Thimphu

Drive to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital. Before lunch, we can Visit Tashichho Dzong, ('the fortress of the glorious religion'), which houses His Majesty's throne room and office for the cabinet secretariat, and the central monk body.

In the afternoon we visit a number of the many sights of Thimphu. As time permits, we can see the following: the National Chorten (built as a memorial to Bhutan's Third King and as a monument to world peace); Changangkha Lhakhang which dates back to 12th century; the Takin Reserve, (the National animal of Bhutan); Dupthob Goemba, where female monks practice Buddhism; the institute for Zorig Chusum, where students learn the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan; the National Institute of Traditional Medicine (only the museum) where herbal medicines are made up and dispensed and traditional medicine practitioners are trained; Folk Heritage Museum, dedicated to connecting people to the Bhutanese rural past through exhibits of rural life; the National Library, which houses an extensive collection of Buddhist literature, including many ancient Buddhist texts in block-printed format. In the afternoon visit to a traditional paper making factory and the National Weaving Centre.

Overnight at Hotel in Thimphu.

Day 03: Thimphu - Punakha

We drive to Punakha via the 3120m high pass Dochu La, stopping there briefly here to take the view and admire the 108 Chortens or Druk Wangyel Chorten which was initiated by Her Royal Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. It was erected in honour of the 4th Druk Gyalpo (the former king) and his people for the victory in the war in southern Bhutan in 2003, as well as for the well being of all the sentient beings. If the weather is clear the following peaks can be seen from this pass (left to right): Masangang (7158m or 23,484 feet), Tshedengang (6960m or 22,835 feet), Terigang (7060m or 23,163 feet), Jejegangphugang (7158m or 23,484 feet), Kahngphugang (7170m or 23,524 feet), Zongaphugang (7060m or 23,163 feet), a table mountain that dominates the isolated

region of Lunana and finally, Gangkar Puensum the highest peak in Bhutan at 7497m or 24,596 feet. Then descend down about 1700m to Punakha through a temperate type of leafy forest where rhododendrons bloom in spring season.

After lunch we visit Punakha Dzong, the winter residence for the Chief Abbot, the head of the Monastic Body and the old capital of Bhutan. There is a lot to tell about this dzong, being one of the most impressive and beautiful ones in Bhutan. You can spend many hours here! For one, the remains of the Zhabdrung, the 'founder' of the Bhutanese nation are kept here. It is also the place where all official meetings happen, such as the installation of new governments and, recently, the royal marriage.

After the visit to the dzong, and time permitting, we can make an optional hike to Khamsum Namgyel Chorten. This stupa was built by the Queen mother of the 5th King of Bhutan. We walk back to Punakha through Yebasa village to Sonagasa where the car will be waiting.

Dinner and overnight at the hotel in Punakha.

Day 04: Punakha – Bhumthang

After breakfast we make a very short hike through the fields to the Chimi Lhakhang, the fertility temple which dates back to the 15th century. Couples without children, miscarriage, and early death of the children get here today to get the fertility blessings.

The drive to Bumthang is long and scenic. It involves crossing the 3300 m high Pela-La and the 3400 m high Yotong La. The Pela La (3300m) marks the border between West and East Bhutan. It is surrounded by thick rhododendron forest. In springtime the many different species are in full blossom.

Driving down, we stop at Chendebje Chorten, the replicate of the Napalese stupa, Shyambunath. We have lunch on the way.

On continuation, we enter Trongsa dzongkhag (district) and reach its 'capital' with the same name, situated at 2180m. Trongsa means "New Village" in the local language and this district was also considered the traditional boundary between east and west. We will visit the remarkable dzong. This elongated, beautiful dzong has a commanding position. Until the new road was constructed, the main road actually ran through the dzong, giving the local administrators full control of traffic and taxes.

Another two and half hours drive will take us to Bumthang via another pass: the Yotong La (3400m).

Overnight at Bumthang.

Day 05: Bumthang – Halt

Bumthang is the general name given to a complex of four valleys with altitude varying from 2600m to 4000m: Chumey, Cheorkor, Tang and Ura.

We spend two days sightseeing, on foot, in Chorkor, Ura and Tang. Apart from the famous Jampa Lhakhang, built in 7th century and probably the oldest temple of the kingdom, and the Kurje Lhakhang which marks the place where Guru Padmasambhava left his body

imprint on the rock, well visit a number of more remote and less visited temple, such as Ngang Lakhang, the “Swan Temple”. This part of the valley was at first inhabited by swans who gave their name (Ngang) to the place. The Lama Namkha Samdrup, having dreamt a vision of how to build a temple, shot an arrow and at the spot where the arrow landed, the Ngang Lhakhang was erected.

Overnight at Bumthang

Day 06: Bumthang – Halt

Today we spend the day walking and visiting temples in the Tang Valley. Last stop will be at Ugyen Choling Palace. This houses one of the most interesting museums of Bhutan. Here we'll spend the night as well.

Day 07-: Ugyen Choling – Phokphey (Distance 17km, five to six hours, 920m ascent, camp altitude 3,680m)

Today's walk is through bamboos, hemlock and finally up to an alpine forest. The camp is in a meadow at the head of the valley.

Day 08: Phokphey – Pemi (Distance 20km, six to seven hours, 480m ascent, 1,160m descent, camp altitude 2,950m)

Rodung La (4,160m) is about three hours climb from the camp. From the pass you then continue downhill through a gorge, overlooking some of the mountain valleys. The region is well known for its sightings of ghosts and yetis. Towards the camp you see pine trees and the ruined stone building was the grain storehouse during the times of the first and second king.

Day 09: Pemi – Khaine Lakhang (Distance 21km, seven to eight hours, 350m ascent, 1,340m descent, camp altitude 2,010m)

This trail winds up and down, passing the villages of Ungaar, Bulay, Kulaypang and Gomda till you reach Drula village and Khaine Lhakhang en route. It is one of the oldest temples in existence today, built in mid 7th century by the King Songtshen Gampo of Tibet to subdue demons.

Day 10: Khaine Lakhang – Tangmachu (Distance 18km, six to seven hours, 520m ascent, 810m descent, camp altitude 1,720m)

From your camp, the trail goes down to a stream and back up to a basic health unit and community school in Gorsam. Further on, you pass a Tibetan-style Umling Mani, built by a lama from Tibet, and a chorten on Zerim La (1,940m). Before reaching the next pass, Tage La (1,760m) you will see Menjabi, a beautiful Bhutanese village with large white houses. South-east of Tage La is Tangmachu High School. About 400 students study in this school. There is a campsite near the school. Another possibility is to organise transport and drive to Lhuentse, the capital of Lhuentse district, with its impressive dzong.

NOTE: The actual Rodungla trek ends at Lhuentse, the following route is part of the Dongla Trek.

Day 11: Tangmachu – Menji (Distance 16km, four to five hours, 690m ascent, 620m descent, camp altitude 1,830m)

Arrive firstly to Kuri Zampa and the trek from here is gradually up through the paddy fields and villages to Chusa.

Day 12: Menji – Pemi (Distance 20km, five to six hours, 620m ascent, camp altitude 2,450m)

Continue uphill through thick forests overlooking mountain views. The camp is under forest shelter at an altitude of 2,400m. Distance: 20 km. Time: six to seven hours.

Day 13: Pemi – Taupang (Distance 21km, seven to eight hours, 1,450m ascent, 1,450m descent, camp altitude 2,450m)

Continue up to Dongla where you will have fascinating mountain views. Descend through thick evergreen forests till you reach campsite. Overnight campsite

Day 14: Taupang – Trashy Yangtse (Distance 24km, eight to nine hours, 720m descent)

Today is the longest trek. It is a gradual downhill trek till Yangtse through chir pine and hardwood forests, and then oak in the sub tropical forest zone. Overnight at camp. Distance: 24 km. Time: eight to nine hours.

Day 15: Trashy Yangtse – Trashigang

Jeeps will await us at Tashi Yangtse. From here we travel to Trashigang the capital of Eastern Bhutan. Here, 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 16: Trashigang – Samdrup Jongkar

A long drive will take us out of the Bhutanese forest-covered mountains to the border town of Samdrup Jongkar. We'll pass through different altitudinal zones with different kinds of forests. At the higher elevations the rododendron forest will be in blossom in spring time. Lower down we'll pass through thick subtropical semi-deciduous forest that is teeming with bird life. The roadsides are rich in plants including ferns and primulas. Samdrup Jongkar is the last overnight stay in Bhutan.

Day 17: Samdrup Jongkar – Guwahati _delhi

Indian jeeps will take you to Guwahati (Assam, India) where you can board a plane to Delhi, Bangkok or other destinations in India.

Price: USD 250 per day (high season: March, April, May, Sept, Oct. Nov) or USD 200 (low season: Dec, Jan, Feb, June, July & Aug) for parties of 3 and more, 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.