

Best of Bhutan and Bangkok

Exploring natural scenery, historic attractions, local culture, and regional festivals in Bhutan and Bangkok/Ayutthaya, Thailand

14 Days / 12 Nights

well tested itinerary and ready-to-go for any group size - pick your own dates



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Tour Program Summary

Bhutan, the land of the "Thunder Dragon", is a pristine and idyllic bastion of solitude nestled high in the Himalayas. Its rich history of Buddhist art and architecture pervades all aspects of life in a nation which has fiercely maintained its ancient culture and traditions and remains a repository of priceless Buddhist art relics. Buddhist festivals in the numerous "Dzongs" (fortress temples) are still an integral part of Bhutanese life.

With varying climatic zones from 600 feet to 24,000 feet in altitude (including the tallest unclimbed mountain on earth), Bhutan offers a great deal of variety packed in a small nation. It is about the size of Connecticut and Maryland combined and has a mere 720,000 inhabitants. Buddhism arrived in the 8th century and has played an integral part in life and culture to this day. Bhutan modernizes slowly and carefully, the king had given up most of the power in 2006 in favor of a parliamentary democracy. Tourism is strictly limited and cultural and environmental protections are prime governmental concerns.

Travel the entire length of this subtropical alpine paradise to examine the Buddhist architecture, statuary, Thangkas, textiles and national parks as well as the breathtaking natural scenery. Explore **Thimphu**, **Phobjika Punakha**, and **Paro**, each town has its own unique natural surrounding and local characters. You will be able to hike some of the most enchanting trails in Asia and interact with local Bhutanese people.

Continue the tour in **Thailand**, a teeming tropical nation of modernity and commerce that has also been shaped by the tenets of Buddhism and its art and architecture over the millennia. As the Kingdom of Siam, Thailand alone resisted the colonial occupations of Southeast Asia and maintained its devout Buddhist beliefs and artistic influence. Observe Thailand's unique expression of the Buddha in statuary and its elaborate gilded temples.

See the current capital metropolis of **Bangkok** and visit **Ayutthaya**, the ancient capital with most of its past grandeur in semi ruin but captivating nonetheless. Enjoy privately guide tours of ancient and contemporary sites of the kingdom while enjoying deluxe accommodations and sampling delicious Thai cuisine.

Fly home from Bangkok.

Tour Daily Itineraries

- Day 01 → **depart** Fly from North America to Bangkok, Thailand
- Day 02 **Bangkok** Arrive in Bangkok today; met upon arrival and shuttle transfer/walk to [Hotel Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport \(superior room\)](#) for an overnight stay. Dinner is on your own.
- Day 03 → **Paro** 🚗
Thimphu After breakfast, your own walk/shuttle transfer to the terminal and depart on Druk Air **KB131 (0650-0955; coach class)** to Paro, Bhutan.
Upon arrival met by your English-speaking national guide and driver; transfer to Thimphu (1 hour), capital of Bhutan, which lies in a valley at 7650 feet (2320 meters) elevation. Check into the [Namgay Heritage Hotel or similar \(deluxe room\)](#), an exquisite property of traditional hand carved wooden rooms and furniture.
After **lunch** in a local restaurant, acclimate to the altitude with a stroll through the town center (the only capital city on earth with no stop lights) to see the Memorial Chorten of Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. Drive to Motithang for a bird's eye view of the capital city. Visit the mini zoo to see 'Takin', the unique national animal of Bhutan.
Enjoy a **Welcome Dinner** of traditional Bhutanese food including the spicy *ema datshi* cheese stew. <B-L-D>



- Day 04 **Thimphu** Breakfast in hotel. This morning, we drive north of Thimphu for less than 30 minutes to get to the base of the hiking trail. This is where the border of the Jigme Dorji National Park begins. From here, you will hike (1 hour) to the 17th century Cheri Gongpa Monastery, repository of priceless artifacts such as the reliquary Stupa of Yab Tempi Nyim.
Enjoy **picnic lunch** at the monastery site before hiking back to the base. Stopping at the Choki Traditional Art School and they have 100% handmade works created by students from all over the country, from paintings to embroidery to woodcarving.
Return to hotel for your own relaxation. Rest of the day and evening are for your own leisure. Dinner is on your own tonight. <B-L>
- Day 05 🚗 **Phobjikha** After breakfast, proceed on a 4-5 hour leisurely drive southeast towards the beautiful valley of Phobjikha. First, stop at Lamperi and visit the Royal Botanic Garden of Bhutan with close to 50 species of Rhododendrons.
Climb through pine forests to Dochula Pass (10,170 feet, 3,100 meters)

to enjoy panoramic views of the snowy Himalayas. With clear weather and luck, we may see 24,840 ft/7570m Gangkhar Puensum, which is the highest mountain in Bhutan. We will have a **lunch** break as well as exploring other sites along the way whenever possible.

Arrive in late afternoon and stay at the quaint Dewachen Hotel (deluxe room) in the quaint Phobjikha Village. The broad valley with its best-known marshland in Bhutan, is popular for its scenic splendor and geographical uniqueness. The valley is rich in faunal biodiversity and has, apart from the globally threatened black-necked cranes, 13 other globally threatened species.

Have a **Local Cuisine Dinner** in hotel. The stars in the sky at night in this unelectrified high valley are absolutely stunning. <B-L-D>



Day 06 **Phobjikha**

Breakfast in hotel this morning. The Phobjikha Valley is at 9,500 feet elevation and it is winter home to the Black necked cranes.

First, visit the Gangtey Gomba Monastery, built in 17th century on a hill top. It is the main temple in the region with a retreat and meditation center for monks. The monastery is surrounded by a large village inhabited mainly by the families of the 140 Gomchens who take care of the temple.

Next, take a short Hike of about 90 minutes, known as the Gangtey Nature Trail, starts from the Mani Stone Wall to the north of the Gangtey Gomba and ends in Khewa Lhakhang.

After **lunch**, go to the Black Crane Protection Center for a visit and the black necked cranes appear in the Bhutanese folk lore, songs, dances and historical references. After the visit, go for a pleasant Trekking in the wooded land and forests on the slope. The trail goes through the Gedachen and Khebayathang villages, leads to the Kilhorthang village and terminates in the Kungathang Lhakhang. If you wish, experience the local traditional **hot stone bath** in the afternoon/early evening at a farmhouse nearby for a fee.

Return to your hotel in late afternoon and **dinner** is at hotel. <B-L-D>

Day 07 **🚗 Punakha**

Breakfast in hotel; check out of hotel and travel northwest by road (3 hrs) to the low and lush Punakha Valley. At an elevation of only 4,000 feet, Punakha is warmer than most of the Kingdom and is ideal for the cultivation of red rice.

Take a gentle hike (30 min.) through the rice paddies and a couple of small villages to the Chimi Lhakhang. This temple is dedicated to the “Divine Madman” yogi Drukpa Kuenley. The 15th century yogi’s reputation for his alcoholic and carnal excesses is depicted in many frescoes in the area.

Visit Nalanda Monastery & Buddhist Institute overlooking the village of Thinleygang. The monastery itself dates back to mid 18th century and founded by the 9th Je-Khenpo (Chief Abbot) Gyalwang Shakya Rinchen Rinpoche. Meet the teachers and monks and get a peek into a contemporary

Buddhist school.

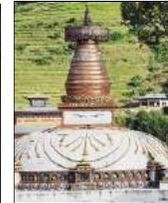
Check in the charming [Uma by Como, Punakha \(valley view room\)](#). Enjoy **dinner** at the hotel. <B-L-D>

Day 08 **Punakha**

After breakfast, enjoy a full day exploration in the region. Visit the [Punakha Dzong](#) at the confluence of the Pho Chhu (*Father*) and Mo Chhu (*Mother*) rivers. The Dzong served as the nation's capital for over 300 years (until mid 1950's) and houses numerous national treasures and Buddhist artifacts. Punakha Dzong is one of the most beautiful Dzongs in the country and a splendid example of Bhutan's fine architectural and artistic traditions.

In the afternoon, we take a pleasant [hike](#) to the nearby [Khamsum Yuley Namgey Lhakhang](#) (temple). The hike begins from the suspension bridge. A 40-minute gradual uphill hike lead us to the [Stupa](#). This magnificent stupa was built by Her Majesty the Queen Mother for the well being of the kingdom and the benefit of all sentient beings. Built over a period of several years, the Bhutanese craftsmen including carpenters, painters, and sculptors consulted Holy Scriptures rather than engineering manuals, to construct this 4-storey temple that presents a [great view](#) of the Mo Chu valley below.

Enjoy your **dinner** in the restaurant of the resort hotel. <B-L-D>



Day 09 **Paro**

Breakfast in hotel. This morning, drive (3 hrs) to [Paro](#) and enjoy more alpine views and village life along the way. Have **lunch** at [Dochula Pass](#). Weather permitting, we will have another good opportunity to view some of the highest mountains in the eastern Himalayas. Arrive in [Paro](#) in the afternoon and check into the luxury [Le Meridien Paro Riverfront \(classic room\)](#).

In the late afternoon, have a tour of the well laid-out [National Museum](#) housed in a unique, semi-circular shaped Ta Dzong, built in 1775. The Ta Dzong with its six floors was once the watch tower for the massive Paro Dzong, built in the 17th century by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The museum has the most extensive collection Bhutanese artifacts and history, which includes ancient crafts, wares, weapons, a collection of antique thangka (*painted or embroidered religious pictures*), textiles, and stamps. The museum provides a wonderful introduction to the rich culture and heritage of the Kingdom.

Enjoy a **Farewell Bhutan Dinner** in the Hotel Zhiwaling with local delicacies. Transfer back to your hotel after dinner in the evening. <B-L-D>

Day 10 **Paro**

After breakfast, begin your today's excursion to the incomparable [Taktsang Monastery](#), known as the **Tiger's Nest**. Legend states Guru Rimpoche, the person who brought Buddhism to Bhutan in the 800s, landed on this cliff on the back of a flying tiger to battle demons. In reality, the monastery was built in the 1600s on sheer cliffs 1000 feet above the valley floor. The [hike](#) to

the monastery through moss covered pines can be arduous.

After the excursion and time permitting, you will visit to Dungtse Lhakhang near town. Return to hotel and take a much deserved rest with time for spa treatment (*not included in tour price*) at the hotel. Evening is free and dinner is on your own. <B-L>



Day 11 → **Bangkok** Breakfast in hotel. Transfer to airport and board Druk Air flight **KB140 (1145-1715; business class)** to Bangkok. Upon arrival, meet your private Thai tour guide and transfer to the five star **The Peninsula Bangkok (your own booking)** for check-in and rest. Dinner is on your own tonight.

Day 12 **Bangkok** After an amazing international breakfast in hotel, start today's exploration of Bangkok. First visit the Reclining Buddha at Wat Po - a giant lying Buddha covered in gold leaf. The Grand Palace is a must-see for every visitor, a perfect example of an ancient Siamese court. Within the compound is the Temple of The Emerald Buddha (Wat Pra Kaew). **Lunch** is in a local Thai restaurant.

Travel by boat on the Chao Phraya River (The River of Kings) and on through the Klongs (canals) of Thonburi. You will have the chance to observe and photograph the serene family homes and temples along the waterways which gave the city the name "Venice of the East".

You will also pay a visit to one of the most photographed sights in Bangkok the Wat Arun. The majestic shrine has a pagoda of 79 meters high. It is decorated with glazed ceramic pieces that reflect the rising sun and gave the temple its name.

Transfer back to hotel for refreshing. This evening, enjoy a **Thai Cuisine Dinner** at Sala Rim Nam Restaurant with a **Traditional Dance Performance**. Return to hotel. <B-L-D>



Day 13 **Bangkok** ↔ **Ayutthaya** Breakfast in hotel and then board a motor coach for 1.5 hour drive north to Ayutthaya, the capital of Siam from 1350 to 1767 and a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Here we focus on the unique architecture of the region.

Visit Chao Sam Phraya National Museum with a curator lead tour of the Thai Art forms spanning centuries. Next visit the Ban-Pa-In Palace, eclectic royal summer residence built in 1600s reflecting Thai, Chinese,

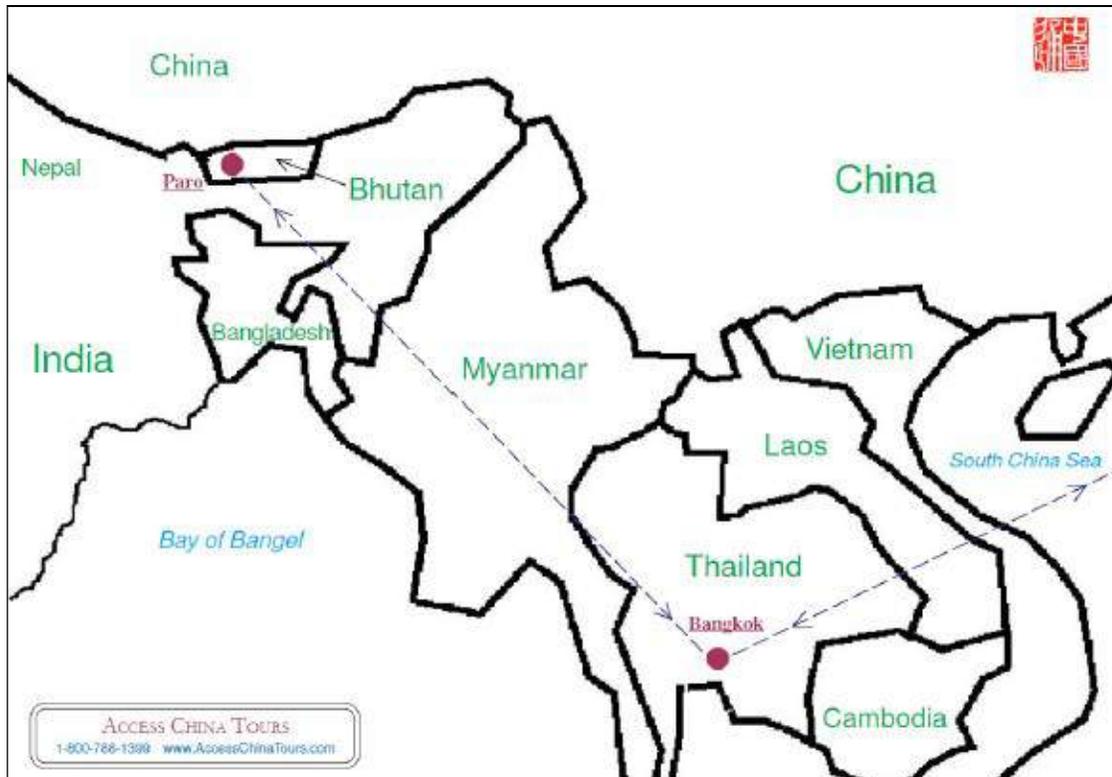
Gothic and Renaissance architectural styles.

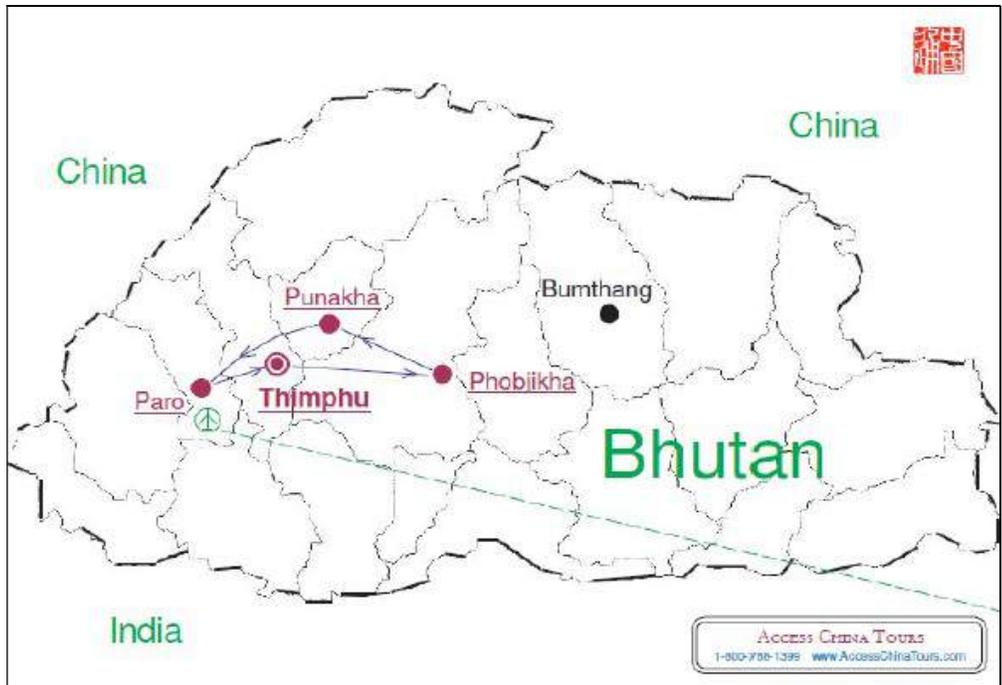
Also tour the temple ruins of Wat Sri Sanphet and Wat Mahadhat. Finish the day with a stroll in gardens of Pra Chedi Suriyothai. Return to Bangkok and evening is free for your own relaxation. <B-L>



Day 14 → return Breakfast in hotel; bid farewell to Thailand and transfer to the airport. Fly home on your own cross-Pacific flight. Service ends.

Changes to Itinerary: Access China Tours has made all possible attempts to ensure the accuracy of tour itineraries. Circumstances beyond our control may occur. We reserve the right to change itineraries, sightseeing activities, and common carriers, and to substitute hotels when necessary. Service of a similar category and standard will be maintained if such changes are made. The Service Voucher in your last pre-departure packet will provide the operational itinerary summary, final transport and hotel information.





Deluxe and Boutique Hotels Selected for Your Tour



Hotel Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport



Namgay Heritage Hotel Thimphu



Dewachen Hotel Phobjikha

Uma by Como, Punakha



Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel & Tower Bangkok

Tour Land Price Inclusions & Exclusions

Tour Land Cost: from **\$5,590 USD** per person double occupancy (*for a group of 2-3 travelers*)
 from **\$5,280 USD** per person, double occupancy (*for a group of 4-5 travelers*)
 from **\$4,970 USD** per person, double occupancy (*for a group of 6-9 travelers*)

What's Included in Tour Land Cost:

- Deluxe and boutique hotel accommodations, double occupancy
- Round-trip air tickets from Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan on coach class
- Arrival and departure transfers on tour dates and ground transportation while on tour
- Bhutan visa fee, permit/fees to museums
- Luggage (1 piece of 45 pounds per person) handling
- Pre-departure information packets
- All sightseeing, excursions, art visits & tours, and cultural events listed in the itinerary
- All meals specified in the itinerary
- Service of a private and professional English-speaking tour guide in each country
- Private, clean, and newer vehicles with air-conditioning and professional driver

What's Not Included in Tour Land Cost:

- International cross-Pacific air tickets to Bangkok (*will quote separately if requested*)
- Alcoholic and certain drinks on included meals (vary at different restaurants)
- Trip cancellation, baggage, accident, and medical insurance
- Gratuities to local tour guides and drivers
- Items not listed and/or specified as included in the itinerary

Cancellation Policy: \$600 pp deposit is required when signing up. All cancellation notices must be received in writing and will become effective as of the date of receipt by *Access China Tours*. We assess cancellation fees of all tours according to the following schedule:

90 days or more prior to departure *	\$300 per person
89 to 50 days prior to departure *	\$600 per person
49 to 30 days prior to departure *	\$900 per person
29 to 15 days prior to departure *	\$1200 per person

* Plus any charges assessed by government agencies, land suppliers, cruise companies and airlines.

Within 14 days of departure100% forfeiture of the tour price per person

Access China Tours will not grant partial refunds for any unused trip arrangements after the trip has commenced or any refunds to participants who do not complete any portion of the itinerary. Any airline tickets issued are subject to the carrier's refund and cancellation policy. **We strongly recommend you purchase trip cancellation/interruption insurance to protect your travel investment.** *Access China Tours* reserves the right to cancel the tour due to insufficient number of travelers. In this case, we will try to find an alternative tour for tour participants. If this is not acceptable, all money paid will be refunded in full and this will constitute full and final settlement for the client. However, *Access China Tours* will not be responsible for any expenses incurred by tour participants (e.g., non-refundable "advance purchase" air tickets, insurance & medical expenses, passport and visa expenses, etc.).

If a tour is forced to be cancelled due to government's travel warnings, declared or undeclared wars, hostilities, civil disturbances, strike, riot, epidemic, and quarantines, *Access China Tours* will refund all participants' payment less any irretrievable expenses and loss (visa fees, airline penalties, communication cost, and non-refundable booking cost, etc.)