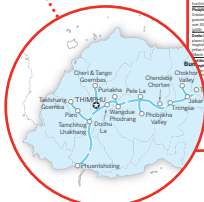
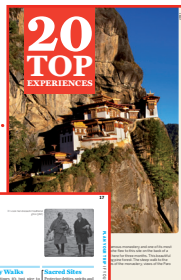


PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions to help you put together your perfect trip

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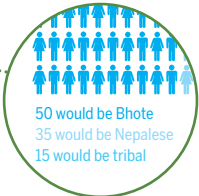
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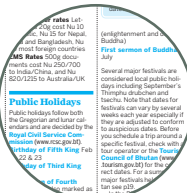


... of forms, ...
... tvas and the ...
... in a lotus pos ...
... prayer. He also ...
... circle, also know ...
Jampelyang (...
The 'princely lord ...
edge – carries a s ...
ignorance. He is ...
yellow.





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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Bradley Mayhew,
Lindsay Brown, Anirban Mahapatra

Bhutan



Thimphu Valley
Hillside monasteries and wonderful hiking trails (p64)

Thimphu
Crafts, museums and a fine weekend market (p44)

Jhomolhari Trek
Bhutan's finest mountain scenery (p153)

Tiger's Nest (Taktshang Goemba)
Bhutan's most spectacular sacred site (p82)

Wangdue Phodrang
Refreshingly restored and strategic dzong (p95)

Kyichu Lhakhang
Beautiful 1300-year-old temple (p80)

Paro
Excellent dzong and the National Museum (p72)

Top Experiences >

Lhodrak

CHINA
TIBET

Punakha Dzong
Bhutan's most beautiful
monastic fortress (p91)

Bumthang
Sacred sites and cultural
heartland (p112)

Trashigang
Launchpad to Bhutan's
wild east (p137)

Tsona

INDIA
(ARUNACHAL
PRADESH)



Gokthong La
Toktu Zampa
Kizum
Mesithang
Yotang La (3425m)
Gyetsa
Jakar
Ura
Zungney
Trongsa

Kuenga Rabten
Zhemgang
Trongsa

Gelephu
Royal Manas National Park
Panbang

LHUENTSE
Lhuentse
Tangmachu
Autsho

Thrumshing La (3750m)
Sengor
Namling
Chali
Ligmethang
Mongar

Pemagatshel
Yongla
Narphung La

Nganglam

Singye Dzong

TRASHI YANGTSE
Bomdeling

Trashiyangtse
Tshenkarla
Shali
Duksum

Chazam
Rangjung
Radi
Phongme

Trashigang
Drametse Goemba
Kanglung
Rongthong
Bartsam
Khaling

Wamrong
Riserboo
Airstrip

Yongla
Narphung La

Deothang
Samdrup Jongkhar

Sakteng
Merak

TRASHIGANG

TRASHIGANG

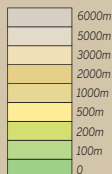
SAMDRUP JONGKHAR
Bhangtar

INDIA
(ARUNACHAL
PRADESH)

Phobjikha Valley
Premier hiking and
crane-spotting location (p98)

Trongsa
Commanding dzong with
a fine museum (p109)

ELEVATION



itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Four Days

A Long Weekend in Paro & Thimphu

If you have limited time or money, you can get a good impression of Bhutan in just four days by concentrating on Thimphu and Paro. Count on two full days in picturesque **Paro**, visiting Paro Dzong and the National Museum. On the second day, hike up to the dramatic Tiger's Nest at **Taktshang Goemba** and visit lovely Kyichu Lhakhang. After lunch make the three-hour drive to Thimphu, stopping at the charming **Tamchhog Lhakhang** en route.

On day three you could squeeze in a long day trip over the Dochu La to **Punakha Dzong**, the most beautiful in the country. In March, budget an hour to walk through the gorgeous rhododendron forests above the **Dochu La** pass. On the way back to Thimphu, pop into the nearby **Chimi Lhakhang**, the temple of the 'Divine Madman'.

Day four is in **Thimphu**. Go to the weekend market and visit **Cheri or Tango Goembas** in the upper Thimphu valley. If handicrafts are your thing, hit the Textile Museum and National Institute of Zorig Chusum. Late in the afternoon drive back to Paro; most flights depart early in the morning.



Seven Days

Haa to Punakha

▶ If you're thinking about a four-day trip, consider a seven-day trip. It's not that much more money and, really, when are you next going to be in Bhutan? A week gives you more time to get a feel for Bhutanese culture and enables you to get off the beaten track in either the Haa or Phobjikha valleys, while still seeing the major dzongs and monasteries of western Bhutan.

With the extra days you can definitely add an overnight trip over the mountains to **Punakha** and nearby **Wangdue Phodrang**, staying in either of these towns. This way you'll have time to make the 1½-hour return hike to the nearby **Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten**, as well as visit Chimi Lhakhang.

To get off the beaten track, add on an overnight trip to the **Haa valley**, on the road that links Paro to Thimphu. The road goes over the highest motorable pass in Bhutan, the Cheli La, and it's worth the couple of hours hiking to visit Kila Nunnery. Arrive in Haa at lunchtime, and spend an afternoon and maybe the next morning exploring the Juneydrak Hermitage and **Chhundu Lhakhang**, before continuing on to **Thimphu**.

Figure on two full days in **Paro**, including visits to Taktshang Goemba, Kyichu Lhakhang and Drukgyel Dzong in the Paro valley, and a full day (or two) in Thimphu. See the previous itinerary for more on what to see in Paro and Thimphu. A few tips: try to be in Thimphu on a Saturday or Sunday to see the weekend market and avoid Paro on Monday, when the National Museum is closed. If you're lucky, you may be able to catch a weekend archery tournament, most likely in Thimphu.

If you don't visit Haa, you might be able to add on a day trip to the **Phobjikha valley**, especially worthwhile in winter (November to February) when the valley's black-necked cranes are roosting.

At some point during your trip ask your guide to arrange a Bhutanese hot-stone bath, available in most tourist hotels (for a charge).



10 Days to Two Weeks

To Bumthang

A 10-day itinerary should allow you two or three days in **Bumthang**, with overnight stops in Paro, Thimphu and Wangdue Phodrang and short stops in Punakha and Trongsas as you drive through. Even better, 14 days will let you see the same places in more depth and at a much more relaxed pace. You could then also include the two-day Bumthang Cultural Trek before you have to turn back to Paro.

Follow the previous four-day itinerary. From Thimphu, a night in the **Phobjikha valley** will give you a chance to see Gangte Goemba and also view the rare and endangered black-necked cranes. If you like to explore places on foot, set aside an extra half-day's hiking in Phobjikha.

From Phobjikha it's a day's drive over the Pele La to the superb dzong and museum at **Trongsas** and on to Jakar in Bumthang. Leave early, as there's lots to see en route, including the Nepali-style **Chendebji Chorten**, which is a good place for a picnic.

If you have two full days in Bumthang, spend one day doing a loop in the **Chokhor valley**, taking in the Jampey Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang and Tamshing Goemba. Day two here should be spent exploring the **Tang valley**, visiting the Burning Lake at Membartsho and the interesting Ogyen Chholing Museum near Mesithang. If you have time, overnight in the Ogyen Chholing Guest House and hike back via the rural village of Gamling.

The Bumthang valley is another good place for some hiking so budget half a day to stretch your legs after a week's driving. From Jakar it's a two-day drive back to Paro, so spend a night at **Wangdue Phodrang** and visit its earthy dzong.

If you intend to visit India in conjunction with Bhutan, consider driving from Thimphu or Paro to **Phuentsholing** instead of flying, which will add a day to the itinerary. From here you are only a few hours from Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim, as well as the airport at Bagdogra, which has frequent flights to Delhi and Kolkata (Calcutta).



Two to Three Weeks

Eastern Explorations

It takes *at least* two weeks to make a trip out to the little-visited far east but you're guaranteed to leave the tour groups behind. There's certainly a *looooot* of driving involved (up to five hours a day in eastern Bhutan) but then getting there is half the fun! With this itinerary you avoid the long drive back to Paro by exiting Bhutan at Samdrup Jongkhar. You do need to arrange an Indian visa before you arrive in Bhutan though. This is a particularly good trip if you're interested in traditional weaving.

Follow the earlier itineraries from Paro as far as Bumthang, from where you can see the highlights of the east in five or six days. From Bumthang, day one takes you on a dramatic drive over the **Thrumshing La** and Bhutan's wildest road to **Mongar**. Stay here for two nights and make a scenic day trip up to remote **Lhuentse**, pausing to visit the dzong, and hike 45 minutes up to the traditional weaving village of **Khoma**.

Day three takes you on to funky **Trashigang**, with a two-or three-hour detour along the way to **Drametse Goemba**, Bhutan's most important Nyingma monastery. Accommodation standards here are not as good as western Bhutan so bring a sense of humour as well as bug spray.

Figure on two nights at Trashigang, with another great day excursion to **Trashi Yangtse**, with stops en route at the pilgrimage site of **Gom Kora**, the old Trashi Yangtse dzong and the Nepali-style Chorten Kora. March and April bring two important pilgrimage festivals to this region. The National Institute for Zorig Chusum is worth a visit to see Bhutan's national crafts, if you haven't seen the Thimphu version.

From Trashigang it's a six-hour winding drive down to the plains at steamy **Samdrup Jongkhar**; stop to check out the traditional weaving at the National Handloom Development Centre in **Khaling**. From Samdrup Jongkhar, take a three-hour taxi ride to Guwahati then fly to Kolkata, Delhi or Bangkok, or take the overnight train to West Bengal for Darjeeling and the Nepal border.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Bradley Mayhew

Coordinating Author, Thimphu, Western Bhutan A self-professed mountain

junkie, Bradley has been trekking in the Himalaya for over 15 years now, spending extended periods of time in Nepal, Bhutan, Ladakh and Tibet. After crossing Bhutan from west to east for the last edition of this guide, Bradley concentrated on the west for this edition, exploring such lesser-visited destinations as the hike to Kila Nunnery and little-visited Dzongdrakha Goemba, as well as walking the Druk Path Trek. Bradley is the coauthor of the Lonely Planet guides *Tibet*, *Bhutan*, *Nepal* and *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya*, as well as a dozen other titles. He was recently the subject of an Arte documentary retracing the route of Marco Polo. Find him at www.bradleymayhew.blogspot.com. Bradley also wrote most Plan Your Trip chapters, the Druk Path Trek, Directory and Transport.

Read more about Bradley at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Nepalibrad



Lindsay Brown

Central Bhutan, Eastern Bhutan Summer in central Bhutan is surprisingly pleasant and relaxed with ample opportunity for interacting with the locals, observing traditional agriculture and tasting the produce. While tackling the roads of eastern Bhutan in summer has its challenges, the raging waterfalls, spectacular birdlife and the intense and varied shades of green make for an amazing adventure. A former conservation biologist and Publishing Manager at Lonely Planet,

Lindsay has trekked, jeeped, ridden and stumbled across many a mountain pass and contributed to Lonely Planet's *South India*, *India*, *Rajasthan*, *Delhi & Agra*, *Nepal* and *Pakistan & the Karakoram Highway* guides, among others. Bradley also wrote Top 20 Experiences, Welcome to Bhutan, Understand chapters and Health.



Anirban Mahapatra

Treks Ever since he enrolled in a Darjeeling school at the age of eight, Anirban has conducted numerous sorties along the Himalaya from Bhutan to Kashmir, trekking down mountain paths, sipping on *chhang* (beer) and meditating in atmospheric Buddhist monasteries. A journalist and travel writer, Anirban has extensively researched Bhutanese culture and society, all the while acquiring a taste for the fiery *ema datse* (chillies). The vertigo-inducing road journey from

Phuentsholing to Thimphu remains one of his all-time favourite Himalaya experiences (despite missing a bottomless gorge by a whisker this time around). A Lonely Planet author since 2007, Anirban lives in Kolkata and Delhi. Anirban also wrote Planning Your Trek and part of the Western Bhutan chapter.

Read more about Anirban at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/anirbanmahapatra

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