

Uma

PARO, BHUTAN
PART OF THE COMO GROUP

Land of the Thunderdragon A Journey into Central Bhutan



7 NIGHT PACKAGE

4 nights Uma Paro, 3 nights Tourist Class hotels

From the gravity defying Tiger's Nest monastery to the temple of the Divine Madman, you are on a journey into the ethereal world that is the Kingdom of Bhutan. This relaxed seven-night adventure, which includes four nights at Uma Paro and three in two locally owned hotels (both clean but basic), journeys deep into the Kingdom's heartland exploring three distinctly different but important valleys - the bustling capital of Thimpu sprawls in its valley dotted with peerless national monuments, museums and markets, the two magnificent dzongs (huge fortress-like monasteries) and majestic rivers of the almost tropical Punakha/Wangdue valley and finally the emerald valley of Paro with its rice paddies, ancient temples and, of course, the 5 star comfort of Uma Paro. It is indeed a privilege to travel around one of the last remaining mountain cultures in the world and to witness the profound spirituality of the people which permeates every aspect of their daily life. In many ways time has stood still here, however, the Land of the Thunderdragon has some rather forward thinking policies and beliefs including "Gross National Happiness" as the standard by which to measure the country's wealth.

Accompanied by an experienced local guide this combination of spectacular drives, unique nature walks and fascinating temple and monastery visits makes this an unforgettable adventure in the land above the clouds.

DAY 1

Arrival at Paro International Airport, Thimpu Sightseeing your Uma Paro guide will welcome you at the airport for the one and a half hour scenic drive to Thimpu, winding alongside two snaking rivers and passing countless fine examples of the quaint, traditional farmhouse architecture of Bhutan. The capital itself sprawls up the wooded western hillside of the Wang Chhu and is the centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimpu is a bustling town where traditional ways mingle with modern introductions. After check in to our hotel in the heart of the capital, the sightseeing begins and depending on opening hours, guests' interests and time, your guide may include some of the following in your private schedule:

The National Memorial Chorten, Trashi Chhoe Dzong: the "fortress of the glorious religion", the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, the National Textile Museum, the Weekend Market, the Folk Heritage Museum, or you may wish to just go window shopping or perhaps try the one hour walk up to Tango Monastery at the head of the valley

Duration of drive: 1- 1.5 hours (50km)

Overnight: Druk Hotel, Thimpu

DAY 2

Thimpu Sightseeing, Punakha Valley via Dochu La, Chimmi Lhakhang the morning provides more opportunities to look around Thimpu before heading off after lunch. This drive is truly awe inspiring as it zigzags up to the 3,140m-high mountain pass of Dochu La with its forests of fluttering prayer flags, maze of memorial chortens and, on a clear day, sweeping views of the main Himalayan range. Time to stretch the legs with the short walk across rice paddies to Chimmi Lhakhang, a fertility temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint known popularly as "Divine Madman." infamous for his colourful and sometimes outrageous adherence to the Buddhist faith. The temple sits atop a picturesque hill surrounded by rice fields. Drukpa Kuenley built a chorten on the site in the 14th century, and it has long been a pilgrimage site for childless couples.

Duration of drive: 3 - 4 hours (76km)

Overnight: Meri Puensum Hotel, Punakha

DAY 3

Punakha Dzong, Khamsan Yuley Namgay Chorten Walk, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong and Bazaar A full day for further exploration of this scenic valley, low enough (1200m) to allow bananas and oranges to grow. The destination for this morning's walk up through whitewashed homesteads and farmland is Khamsum Yuley Namgay Chorten, a shrine recently built by the royal family a startlingly ornate and elaborate structure with a rainbow of Guru Rinpoche images and superb views of the Punakha Valley. Heading down along the riverside the massive architectural edifice of the 17th century Punakha Dzong (fortress/monastery) soon looms into view. Built in 1637 by Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal in a commanding position at the confluence of the Po Chhu and Mo Chhu (Father and Mother rivers). Bhutan's second oldest dzong goes by the full name of Druk Pungthang Decchen Phodrang (the Palace of Great Happiness) and is arguably the country's most attractive. It served as the seat of the Kingdom's government until the time of the second King and today serves as the winter home of Je Khempo, the head abbot of Bhutan, along with a retinue of 1,000 monks.

An afternoon stroll through the quaint bazaar at Wangdue Phodrang to visit its dzong rounds off the day. Founded in 1638 by the Shabdrung, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong is located on a high promontory overlooking the Punak Chhu river.

Overnight: Meri Puensum Hotel, Punakha

DAY 4

Punakha Valley to Paro, Chuzom, Tamchog Lhakhang, Free Time to retrace our steps back over the Dochu La for a second chance of that wonderful view of the Himalayan range. Returning to the Chuzum or confluence we catch a glimpse of the three shrines in Nepali, Tibetan and Bhutanese style which were built to ward off evil spirits near the checkpoint. Time permitting the journey can be broken with a visit to Tamchog Lhakhang built by Thangtong Gyalpo or the Iron Bridge Builder as he is known. This former saint from the 14th century introduced the art of building suspension bridges with iron chains and the only way to reach his temple is by one of these bridges. On the final leg the road snakes alongside the Pa Chhu, through apple orchards and rice paddies, past quaint homesteads to our home in the Himalaya, Uma Paro. After check-in and a show round, we invite you to spend the rest of the day relaxing around the property, enjoying the facilities or perhaps trying some other activity like the Bhutanese national sport of archery or maybe a therapy such as the traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath.

Duration of drive: 4 - 5 hours (120km)

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 5

Chhubjakhar Monastery Walk Ascend from Uma Paro through blue pine forest to a viewpoint amongst prayer flags on ridge. The path continues up the ridge then traverses to Gemjo La Goemba (monastery) high above Uma. Hopefully one or both of our old friends Mindu and Passang will be there to meet us. A wide plateau flanked by orchards and forest is reached after a short climb from the monastery. Linger here awhile soaking up the magnificent mountain views and exploring the ruined fortress, deserted farmhouses and nearby Chhubjakhar monastery. There is now the option to either head off on a longer walk for further exploration or turn back for Uma Paro.

Duration: 5 - 7 hours depending on which option is taken

Difficulty: Moderate

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 6

Daywalk Zurig Dzong, Rinpung Dzong, Ta Dzong, Paro Town & Kyichu Lhakhang Wind through pine forests high above Uma Paro to the pretty grounds of the fortress-like monastery of Zuri Dzong. Traverse across to Ta Dzong, housing Bhutan's National Museum (open Tuesday-Saturday) with magnificent views over Paro, and on down to visit Rinpung Dzong - 'Fortress on a Heap of Jewels'. The trail then leads across Paro Chhu (river) via a traditional covered bridge (Nyamai Zam) and then past the main archery ground, Ugyen Pelri Palace and into Paro town. A few kilometers north of Paro, we pay our respects at Kyichu Lhakhang one of the oldest temples in Bhutan with its magic orange tree which bears fruit all year round.

Duration: 5 - 7 hours (depending on time spent in National Museum and Paro)

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Guided with picnic

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 7

Highlights of the Paro Valley - Taktsang Walk & Drukgyel Dzong One of the most amazing and important pieces of architecture in Bhutan, Taktsang Goemba defies logic, gravity, and reason. Legend has it that this cliffside was where Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) landed on the back of a flying tigress, bringing Buddhism to Bhutan from Tibet.

To avoid the hot sun an early start is advisable for the two-hour climb, via the cafeteria, to the Tiger's Nest viewpoint. Descend steeply, then climb up to the monastery, passing a waterfall (visit monastery if it is open – with sufficient notice Uma Paro can arrange a permit). We retrace our steps or alternatively (time permitting) head further up to several remote temples and monasteries. Drive further up the valley to Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1644 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to control northern route to Tibet. The route is picturesque, and the site of dzong magnificent (from here, only two-day hike to the border with Tibet, dominated by Mt Jhomalhari).

Duration: 7 – 8 hours

Difficulty: Moderate to Hard (ascent should not be attempted until at least third day in Bhutan, after acclimatization has occurred, riding ponies are available at an additional charge)

Guided with picnic

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 8

Depart Druk Air departs in the early morning to avoid adverse weather conditions so after breakfast, your transfer to the airport will be arranged for between 5am and 9am depending on the flight schedule and your destination.

Outside of Uma Paro, we have selected well-located, comfortable, somewhat rustic but charming tourist class hotels in terms of food and accommodation, for our journey.

On this privately guided itinerary we include all accommodation, meals, activities listed in the itinerary, experienced English speaking Uma guide, vehicle, taxes and airport transfers.

Uma Paro provides complimentary drinking water for all guided itineraries. If you have any special dietary requests, please let us know in advance. Where stated, trips include lunchtime picnics prepared by Uma Paro's chefs. Please place your picnic order the day before departure via your Guide or the Activity Desk on extension 3308.

Throughout your stay you have the option to participate in a range of extra Outdoor Activities at an additional charge.

Travel to Bhutan Uma Paro handles the whole booking process on behalf of our guests, including Druk Air flights (not included in the package) and visa applications (included in the package) but it is advisable to book well in advance to secure accommodation and seats on Bhutan's national airline - Druk Air.

Please read this document in conjunction with your confirmation letter and pre-departure information.

For more information on Uma Paro, including the full range of itineraries and services (including tailor-made itineraries, groups and the hosting of special events) we offer, please refer to the website www.uma.como.bz or email info.paro@uma.como.bz