

Hidden Valleys of Bhutan with Black-necked Crane Festival

A unique walking holiday in Bhutan offering an 'insiders' view of the kingdom.



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Walking
Accommodation	Hotels, Farmhouse homestays, 1 night camping
Grade	Gentle / Moderate
Duration	16 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	Walks on: 5 days On trek: 2 days
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Leader Bhutan
Land only	Joining in Kathmandu, Nepal
Max altitude	3,990m/13,090ft, Chele La Pass, day 10

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



tel: +44 (0)1453 844400 fax: +44 (0)1453 844422 info@mountainkingdoms.com www.mountainkingdoms.com

Mountain Kingdoms Ltd, 20 Long Street, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire GL12 7BT UK
Managing Director: Steven Berry. Registered in England No. 2118433. VAT No. 496 6511 08

Departures

Group departures

2024 Dates:

Fri 15 Mar - Sat 30 Mar With Paro Tsechu
Sat 04 Nov - Sun 19 Nov With Black-necked Crane Festival

This detailed itinerary is for our autumn departure only. A separate itinerary is available for our spring departure and can be downloaded from our website or requested from the Mountain Kingdoms office.

Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 4 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday. If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

Your guide



You will have an English-speaking Bhutanese guide to lead your trip. Mountain Kingdoms have been working with the same partner in Bhutan since 1986 and their guides are some of the best in the Kingdom. They speak good English, as this is taught in all Bhutanese schools, and are fully qualified guides. The Tourism Authority of Bhutan insists that a Bhutanese trek or tour leader must pass his/her guiding exams in Thimphu before accompanying groups of foreign visitors.

Your trip highlights

- Spend three nights in approved farmhouse homestays to meet the local people and experience their lives and traditions first hand
- Trek for two days to celebrated Tiger's Nest temple, camping for one night at the remote monastery of Bumdra
- Enjoy varied and interesting day walks in delightful settings
- Discover the beautiful 'hidden' valleys of Phobjika and Haa
- Attend the Black-necked Crane Festival

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-3	Fly to Kathmandu. Fly to Paro.
Days 4-5	Sightseeing in Paro. Drive to Thimphu. Walk to Wangditse Monastery and sightseeing.
Day 6	Drive to Punakha. Visit Punakha Dzong. Three Temples Walk in the Jibjokha Valley.
Days 7-8	Drive to Gangtey. Walks and sightseeing. Attend the Black-necked Crane Festival. Stay in farmhouse homestays.
Day 9	Drive to Thimphu with a walk down from the Dochu La on the way.
Days 10-11	Drive to Haa, explore Haa town and walk in the Valley. Overnight in a homestay. Return to Paro.
Days 12-13	Bumdra Trek to Taktsang Temple. Camp by Bumdra Monastery.
Days 14-16	Fly to Kathmandu. At leisure. Overnight flight to London.

Trip summary

Historically the Himalaya was a patchwork of small kingdoms from one end to the other. Over time many were swallowed up in the formation of larger countries and in so doing very often the uniqueness of their cultures was lost. Bhutan thankfully survived intact due to the foresight of its rulers, and because its natural defences made it a very difficult country to invade. Not only does it have a solid wall of mighty Himalayan peaks in the north, but its foothills rise straight up from the plains of India and were easily defended. It was unified in the early 1600's by one of the most powerful personages in Himalayan history, Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal, whose red hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism still flourishes to this day. He built magnificent monastery/fortresses, introduced a rule of law, and defeated Tibetan invaders by use of black magic.

So it is today that the customs and traditions are as strong as ever, and the people still wear colourful national costume, and live in architecturally distinct houses more akin to Swiss chalets. The dragon sect of Tibetan Buddhism is central to all that they do, and they adore their royal family. They believe in non-violence, preservation of nature, and actively promote policies of sustainability and conservation. They are proud to be a carbon negative country and strictly enforce laws to protect their massive pristine forests.

When people visit Bhutan they go not just to view the highest unclimbed peak in the world and its family of satellite peaks, but more to experience the people and their fabulous culture. Recognising this, the government has approved a number of farmhouse homestays so that people can experience first hand daily life of rural Bhutanese families. These homestays offer simple accommodation but a chance to meet local people and provide an authentic experience of life in Bhtuan. This holiday spends three nights in village homestays where meals may be taken with the families. In some cases you can try the hot stone baths, and perhaps play some archery, and look around the farms. This is just part of a walking holiday that includes hikes to temples, explores Bhutan's unique dzongs and townships and visits the lesser-known valleys of Haa, Phobjika and Jibjokha where we have a brand new walk. On this departure you will also join the festivities at the Black-necked crane Festival which celebrates the arrival of these beautiful, sacred birds.

As a climax you take a two day trek to see Taktsang cliff temple. Most people visiting Bhutan approach the Tiger's Nest temple from below as a return day hike. You take a much more special route camping overnight at Bumdra Lhakhang before descending to Taktsang. This is part of a pilgrimage route that locals use to gain merit in their search for enlightenment and provides a fitting climax to this varied adventure in the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon.

Special notes

Flights between Kathmandu and Paro

Please note that there is the small possibility that flight schedules between Kathmandu and Paro could change in the coming months. This may result in alterations to the itinerary and/or the dates of travel.

Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Depart London.

Fly overnight from London to Kathmandu.

Overnight: In flight

Day 2: Arrive Kathmandu. Group transfer to hotel.

On arrival in Kathmandu you will be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel. Later in the evening you may want to try out one of the many restaurants in nearby Thamel - the heart of the main tourist area in Kathmandu.

Overnight: Hotel Shanker or Similar, Kathmandu

Day 3: Fly to Paro. Sightseeing as time permits.

After breakfast you will transfer to the airport for the short flight up to Bhutan. On a clear day the panoramic views of the Himalaya are sensational, including Everest and Kangchenjunga, but particularly exciting is the approach through the Bhutanese foothills and the landing, including a few steep turns to land at the tiny airstrip of Paro. Although you are at the mercy of the airline computer, if possible try to sit on the left hand side of the plane for the most spectacular views.

In Paro you will be met by your Bhutanese guide and transferred to your hotel. Depending on the flight schedule you may have time for a little sightseeing or exploration of the town on arrival.

Overnight: Hotel Olathang or Similar, Paro (Meals: BLD)

Day 4: AM: Sightseeing in Paro Valley. Drive to Thimphu, visit giant Buddha statue.

Today's sightseeing will begin at the ancient temple of Kyichu Lakhang which was one of 108 temples built by Songtsen Gampo an important early Tibetan king, to pin down the Bon demon who was thought to hover over the whole of Tibet.

You will then visit the huge Paro Dzong, one of the most important in the kingdom. Above the dzong is the ancient watchtower or Ta Dzong. This 17th century circular building houses Bhutan's National Museum and has recently undergone a major restoration. The museum has a fantastic collection of Bhutanese national treasures with displays including depictions of a wide range of Bhutan's history and culture and an impressive collection of ancient thangka featuring Bhutan's important saints and teachers. You will also find some fearsome festival masks, a collection of religious statues, some early stone carvings and the original iron links from the nearby Tamchhog Bridge.



In the afternoon you will drive to Thimphu - a journey of around 1½-2 hours. Thimphu has an attractive valley location and is relatively small for a capital city although it has grown greatly in recent years. When you arrive in Thimphu you will drive up to see the large Buddha statue, perched above the town, this will give you excellent views and is a good way to orientate yourself to Thimphu and its surrounds.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)

Day 5: Walk to Wangditse Monastery. Sightseeing in Thimphu.

This morning you will drive up to Sangaygang next to the Bhutan First Broadcasting Service tower, located in the North West of Thimphu. It is only about a mile drive up to the tower so if you feel like you would like to burn a bit more energy you can always walk up instead. From the tower you will have great views over Thimphu Dzong and the Thimphu valley as you start your walk contouring the beautiful hills to visit Wangditse Gumpa. This walk should take around 1½ hours. You will have time to visit the gumpa before you walk down for another 30 minutes to reach Dechen Phodrang Monastery. This monastery houses around 450 student monks enrolled in an 8 year course. The monastery is also home to some fantastic UNESCO monitored 12th century paintings. You will then meet your vehicle and be driven back to Thimphu.

In the afternoon there will be time to enjoy some sightseeing. There are many places of interest to visit in Thimphu, including the Tashichhodzong (the main government buildings), the Textile Museum, the Heritage Museum, the late King's Memorial Chorten, the National Library, the School of Painting and the silversmiths and pottery workshops. The Government Handicrafts Emporium is possibly the best place to look for local handicrafts. It is interesting to visit the handmade paper workshop to see the paper being made and there are some nice items made from handmade paper for sale there. You could also visit the Post Office to buy some of Bhutan's very attractive stamps, they will even print a valid stamp with your face on it while you wait! They also have good t-shirts on sale. While in Thimphu you might also like to visit the 'zoo'. This is in fact a very large enclosure (several acres) just above the town, containing only Takin, the very rare animal found exclusively in Bhutan and parts of China and possibly one of the most quirky and strangest looking animals you will ever see.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)

Day 6: Drive over the Dochu La to Punakha - 77 km, 3 hours. Visit Punakha Dzong. Three Temples Walk in the Jibjokha Valley - 4-5 hours.

After breakfast you will drive east to Punakha. Leaving Thimphu you climb to cross the Dochu La Pass, 3,109m/10,200ft, a spot marked by 108 chortens. Here, weather permitting, you may take in a magnificent mountain vista.

You descend from the pass into the lush Punakha Valley then drive to Punakha Dzong. This is one of the most spectacular and important dzongs in the kingdom as well as being one of the most picturesque. It is situated at the confluence of two rivers - the Mo Chu and the Pho Chu. Damaged by flooding in 1994, the dzong has now been beautifully renovated and is a real showcase for Bhutanese craftsmanship and painting. You are normally allowed into the dzong unless there are VIPs visiting.



From Punakha Dzong you make the short drive to the Jibjokha Valley to do the Three Temples walk. This is a new, circular, day walk in three scenic valleys that follows undulating paths and tracks through picturesque, open farmland, shady woods and vast rice terraces. In the autumn, these terraces can appear to glow with a golden hue as the sunlight hits the rice stalks swaying in the wind. There's not too much ascent and no steep climbs so it's an opportunity for a gentle walk to see traditional village life in rural Bhutan. It is a walk that was created for Mountain Kingdoms so don't expect to see other westerners on the trail.

Walking from the Kuenga Zhedheyling farmhouse you pass through the rice terraces, soon encountering your first temple (or lakhang) at the tiny settlement of Jibjokha. There are some interesting statues to see here. As you progress, your guide will point out Pangtse Shing (Symplocus) trees near the trail. This tree has many medicinal benefits and is also used for dyes and for the oil from its seeds which is prized in Bhutanese cuisine. In spring you will see the trees in flower and then the fruits appear in the autumn when the oil is extracted. Your hike continues through fields into the Wangkha Valley where you will find your second temple built 40 years ago by the locals. After leaving the lakhang you will come across the house of Aum Karma Dem and may be able to rest awhile in her front garden and enjoy a cup of tea. Continuing on through more terraces the trail then enters some woods providing welcome shade if the weather is warm. At the end of the woods you reach a feeder 'road' leading into the Dawakha Valley. This valley is much more populated than the others. The main village here is Dawakha, which sits on high ground affording good views of the surrounding hills and valleys.

This is the home of the third temple of the walk. There is also a shop in the village so you may be able to grab a cold drink before setting off downhill on a wooded track to get back to Jibjokha. After your walk you drive to your accommodation.

Overnight: Zhingkham Resort or Similar, Punakha (Meals: BLD)

Day 7: Drive to Gangtey, 78 km - 3 hours. Visit the Black-necked Crane Information Centre and Gangtey Dzong. Walk in the Gangtey Valley.

After breakfast you will drive to Gangtey, 78kms away, which takes around 3-4 hours. From Punakha you drive down the valley to the town of Wangdiphodrang whose massive and important dzong unfortunately burnt down in 2012. It is now being reconstructed. You drive through the few houses which mark the former township of Wangdi and on up the beautiful wooded valley of the Dang Chu River and turn off to arrive at the Gangtey Valley.

Gangtey, also properly known as the Phobjikha valley, is a beautiful glacial valley, wide, wooded and unspoilt. It is particularly famous as a major wintering ground for Black-necked cranes, which arrive here late October and stay until early spring before heading back to their breeding grounds in Tibet and Siberia. These birds are particularly respected in local culture and feature in local tradition as 'heavenly birds'.

You should have time to visit the fine 17th century Gangtey Gumpa and then on to the Black-necked Crane Information Centre. You then may have the chance for a pleasant walk in the Gangtey Valley.

Overnight: Farmhouse Homestay, Gangtey Valley (Meals: BLD)

Day 8: Attend the Black-necked Crane Festival.

Today you will attend the Black-necked Crane Festival. This festival is relatively new and is not one of the more famous ancient religious set-piece tsechus such as the Thimphu Tsechu. Instead it is a more recent and local affair organised by conservation bodies along with the local people to celebrate the return of the Black-necked cranes from their summer sojourn in Siberia and to increase awareness of the importance of this majestic but globally endangered bird. The festival features a cultural program with folk songs, masked dances (many with crane themes) along with dramas and songs performed by local people and school children. It is all very jolly and friendly.

Overnight: Farmhouse Homestay, Gangtey Valley (Meals: BLD)

Day 9: Drive to Dochu La Pass. Walk from the pass and drive to Thimphu.

From your homestay you drive up over the pass leading out of the 'hidden' valley of Phobjikha and down to Wangdiphodrang. Passing through the town you cross the river and proceed along the valley before the long climb through dense forest which leads towards the Dochu La Pass, 3,109m/10,200ft.

You will take a lovely walk of about 4 hours from the pass and rejoin your transport further down along the road to Thimphu. This is a pleasant trail which takes you up the ridge in rhododendron forest to Lungchezekha Gumpa, from where there are further fantastic mountain views. Your trail then descends in beautiful mixed forest, passing Tashigang Gumpa to emerge at the road at Hongthso, where you will meet your transport. You then drive to Thimphu.

Overnight: Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu (Meals: BLD)

Day 10: Drive over the Chele La Pass to Haa, 2,950m/9,700ft

Today you drive from Thimphu to Haa across the Chele La Pass. On the way to the pass you will pay a visit to the temple of Dzong Drakha, a beautiful cliff temple spectacularly located on a broad ledge with vertical limestone cliffs above and below. There are lovely views from here. You will also visit Kila Nunnery located just below the pass.

Continuing up to the Chele La, a pass at 3,990m/13,090ft, in clear weather you will have wonderful views of the snow capped mountains to the west which mark the border with Tibet. You then descend on a long, long zig-zag road down into the Haa Valley. As you approach you will notice three almost identical conical hills in a

line on the other side of the valley. These are believed by the locals to be the physical manifestations of three very important Buddhist saints. The left one is Manjushri (the god who holds the flaming sword which cuts the knot of ignorance), the middle one is Chenrizig (the Buddha of compassion of which the Dalai Lama is the human incarnation) and the right hand hill is Chana Dorji (this being the protector god of Bhutan). Collectively they are known as Rigsum (three hills). As you descend further you look down on the square yellow roof of the main monastery/fortress, Namgay Dzong. Spread around the dzong are the buildings of the Indian Army dating from the visit of President Nehru - the Indian army has a presence in Bhutan ostensibly to protect the kingdom from possible invasion from China. Although part of the dzong is used by the Indian Army the central tower of the Dzong is still used by the local people. The old town itself is just to the north-west and is really quite attractive with traditional two storey shops and a post office. There is a large school in Haa. In the afternoon you should have time for a little exploration in the Haa Valley.

Overnight: Farmhouse Homestay, Haa Valley (Meals: BLD)

Day 11: Day walk in the Haa valley. Drive back to Paro, 65 km - 2 hours drive.

Today you have much of the day in the Haa Valley. Initially it is worth driving up to the very top of the valley for an overview. This takes about 40 minutes (11 kms) and is a very pretty drive. From here you will get really good views of Haa Valley itself as well as over to the west to some of the mountains near the Tibetan border.



Coming back down towards the town you take a spur road to Talung village which is 20 minutes on a rough road. This village is situated in a small side valley and it's a good idea to take the vehicles to the top of the village and then walk down through the houses for a look at a typical Haa village. You may well receive 'invites' into one or two of the farmhouses.

You can rejoin your vehicle at the bottom of the village and then drive the short distance to the bottom of a track for a nice walk up to Yongto Gompa, an ascent of 100 metres which takes about 30 minutes. Yongto Gompa is perched on a ridge overlooking the main valley and is one of the oldest monasteries in Haa, thought to have been built in the 15th century. From here you walk steeply down the hill, 30 minutes and 200m descent, through pine trees, to Yangtha village. This is a large village on the floor of the main valley. In 2001 they suffered a huge fire which destroyed 12 houses. Amazingly, the fire left the temple of the village perfectly intact. After the fire the King visited the people of the village and paid for the reconstruction. The new houses are built in exactly the same traditional style and blend in remarkably well. Return drive to Paro in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Hotel Olathang or Similar, Paro (Meals: BLD)

Day 12: Start the trek to Bumdra. Camp beneath Bumdra Monastery, 3,800m/12,467ft.

After breakfast you will take a short drive to the starting point of the two day Bumdra trek. Here you will meet your trek crew and ponies, and then begin following a little trodden trail up from Paro Valley. Your initial ascent takes you up through forest to reach a ridge then to a clearing from where you will be able to see back down the Paro Valley. Continuing up, you next reach Chhoe Tse Lhakhang temple, nestled in the side of the mountain, where you can rest and enjoy fine views of Paro beneath and the snow-capped Himalaya in the distance. The final stage is now ahead of you as you ascend through ruins and thick forest to a high, open yak pasture bedecked with chortens and colourful prayer flags. This will be your campsite for the night at around 3,800m/12,467ft. The altitude should not be a problem having been in Bhutan now for 10 days..

Above the pasture sits the seventeenth century Bumdra Monastery, hugging the cliff face. After a chance to rest and enjoy the spectacular views from the campsite you can walk up to the monastery and explore its many caves where legend has it that a thousand angels, or dakinis, once convened. If you have the energy, you could also make the 45 minute climb of Namgo La just behind the monastery. Its 4,100m peak provides a natural viewing 'platform' to enjoy the commanding vistas of the surrounding mountains and valleys.

Overnight: Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 13: Trek to Taktsang Monastery. Return to Paro.

After a tough day of ascent yesterday, today is all downhill. After breakfast at the camp, you will begin your descent. Following the monks' winding path down through larch and silver pine you can take your first welcome breather on the conveniently located deck chairs at the small hermitage of Yoselang at 3,300m. Continuing down the path you will shortly reach Zangto Pelhri Monastery, from where you can peer over the side for your first fantastic views down to the golden roofs of Taktsang Monastery. From here it's a steep half hour down a rock hewn staircase to Taktsang - an approach that very few people experience to reach the famed Tiger's Nest.

The monastery is perched some 600m/2,000ft up on a cliff overlooking Paro Valley and was said to be where the legendary Indian saint, Guru Padma Sambhava, flew from Tibet on the back of a tiger to defeat five demons, who were opposing the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan.

If open, you will be able to visit the monastery before continuing down to reach the car park where your vehicle will be waiting to take you back to your hotel in Paro, and your last night in Bhutan.

Overnight: Hotel Olathang or Similar, Paro (Meals: BLD)

Day 14: Fly to Kathmandu. Transfer to hotel. Time at leisure.

On your flight back to Kathmandu there are fabulous views of the Himalaya in every direction. Try to sit on the right side of the plane for the best views. On arrival, you will be transferred to your hotel and the rest of the day is at leisure.

Overnight: Hotel Shanker or Similar, Kathmandu (Meals: B)

Day 15: Time at leisure. Transfer to airport. Depart Nepal.

Kathmandu, Asia's former hippie capital, has a wonderful mixture of crowded bazaars, Hindu and Buddhist temples, shrines and stupas, colonial and ancient architecture as well as more modern buildings. You could explore the bazaars and temple complexes of Durbar Square to best absorb the myriad impressions assailing your culture-shocked senses.

Later in the afternoon there will be a group transfer to the airport for your flight back to London.

Overnight: In flight. (Meals: B)

Day 16: Arrive London.

Our grading system

Hidden Valleys of Bhutan is graded as a Gentle/Moderate walking holiday, as described below.

Gentle

Trips within this grade typically mix sightseeing with easy-paced half and/or full day walks. On these trips, walks will be on relatively low altitude trails, for a duration of around 4-6 hours. On all of our Gentle graded trips, some ascent and descent should be anticipated, and there may occasionally be a longer walking day. Holidays within this grade generally use hotels and comfortable lodges although a few do have some nights camping. These holidays are suitable for people who enjoy easy-paced walks in the British countryside or exploring on foot rather than in a vehicle.

Moderate

Holidays in this grade typically involve 5 to 10 days of walking or trekking. They will often venture into more remote country and can cross mountain passes. Altitudes though are still relatively low, going no higher than around 4,300m/14,000ft. Accommodation can include simple hotels, tea houses, lodges and camping.

What the price includes

Mountain Kingdoms aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

What's included:

- ✓ An English-speaking Bhutanese leader
- ✓ All internal flights and domestic airport transfers
- ✓ The use of a good quality down jacket and sleeping bag (when travelling to Bhutan via Kathmandu).
- ✓ 4* hotel in Kathmandu on a bed & breakfast, twin-share basis
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation in Bhutan on a full board, twin-share basis.
- ✓ Three nights in Bhutan Government approved farmhouse homestays with all meals
- ✓ One night camping with all camping facilities (twin share tents) and all meals on trek
- ✓ Camp staff to carry out all camp work
- ✓ Bhutan Visa and Bhutan departure tax
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ Single, timed, group airport transfers for international flights on arrival and departure
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms kitbag

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

What's not included:

- × Travel insurance
- × Visa fees for Nepal
- × Lunch and evening meals in Kathmandu
- × Optional trips
- × Tips

Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate. For further information about our campaign visit

<https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>

Your accommodation

We will endeavour to secure the hotels named in the itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is not available we will book a suitable alternative of a similar standard.

Hotels in Bhutan

Please note that there is generally a shortage of hotel/lodge accommodation in Bhutan, especially outside Paro and Thimphu. Although we pre-book rooms as far in advance as possible, anything can happen and probably will, e.g. if the royal family suddenly has a visiting delegation, accommodation may be changed at short notice. Additionally, during peak seasons, it can sometimes be very difficult to secure not only the hotels/lodges we want, but also the single rooms we might need. In these circumstances singles may occasionally be asked to share but in such cases we refund any single room supplements that might apply. Given these conditions we will make every effort to secure any of the following hotels:



Hotel Shanker or Similar, Kathmandu

The Shanker is a 4* heritage hotel situated just a 10-15 minute walk from the tourist area of Thamel. It has an outdoor swimming pool, a spa and a lovely garden, plus a choice of restaurants and bars. Rooms are large, elegant and well-equipped. The hotel is a converted royal palace with a fascinating history which in recent years has undergone a thorough and tasteful renovation.



Phuntso Pelri Hotel or Similar, Thimphu

Despite its somewhat dark entrance hall, this new hotel is very well appointed, with custom made Bhutanese wooden furniture and good sized rooms. During busy periods, especially during festivals, we may use the Jomolhari Hotel, the Kisa Hotel, Hotel Gakyil, Hotel Osel or the Amodhara Hotel. These are amongst the best tourist class hotels in Thimphu.



Zhingkhram Resort or Similar, Punakha

Overlooking Punakha Dzong, and only opened in 2016, the Zhingkhram Resort is one of the best hotels in Punakha. The well-proportioned, stylish rooms come complete with free Wi-Fi, minibars and coffee/tea making facilities as well as delightful views of the surrounding hills and countryside.



Hotel Olathang or Similar, Paro

Olathang Hotel. Originally built for the coronation of the 4th King in 1974, this attractive hotel stands on a hill overlooking Paro town. Accommodation is spread between the main building and a number of cottages in the grounds. Bedrooms are of a good standard, the staff are friendly and decoration and furnishings are of typical Bhutanese style. We have always found the food to be of a high quality.



Farmhouse Homestays

A selection of properties have been approved by the Tourism Council of Bhutan. They are located in gorgeous Bhutanese countryside, and this gives you the opportunity of seeing the daily life and traditions of typical Bhutanese families. The properties vary in size and age. Some are more than 200 years old, others only 20 years old. Regardless of age, they are all simple, but with bags of character. Meals, in some cases, can be taken with the family and the food is delicious - but go easy on the chillies!! Electricity is available in some of the homestays and all will provide hot water for washing. There may even be a hot stone bath to enjoy. Please note that if we have a full group, we may use two homestay properties.

Meal arrangements

Bed and breakfast in Kathmandu. All meals in Bhutan.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

Further information

When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

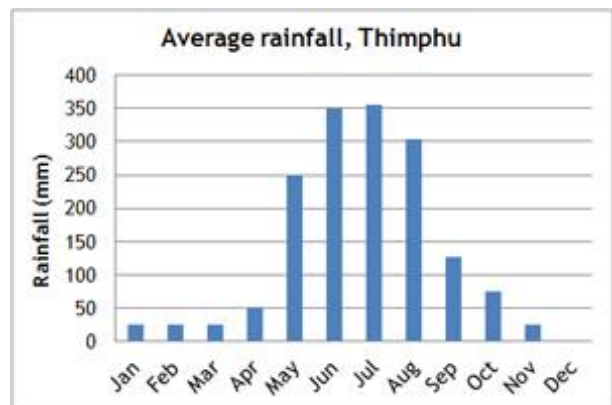
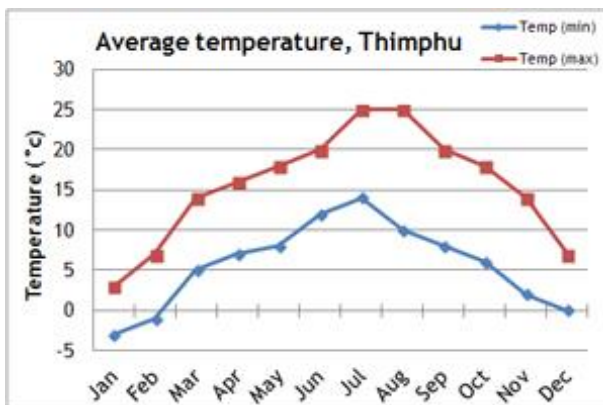
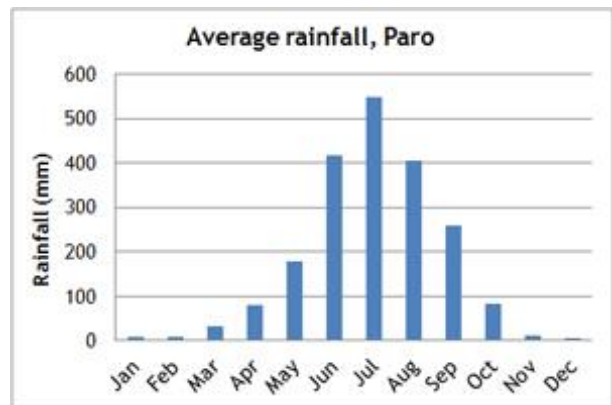
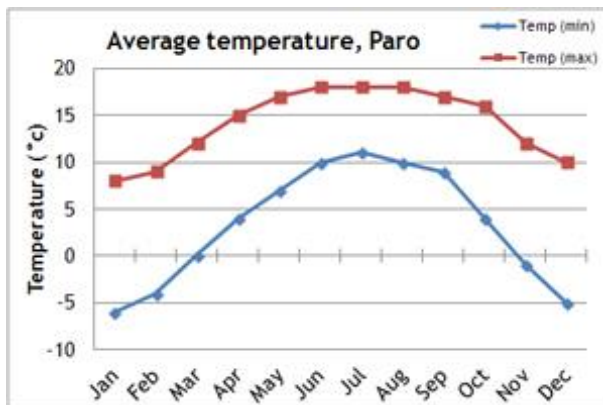
Trip altitude

Important - please be aware that this trip involves travel at altitude. Whilst all our itineraries are carefully designed to optimise acclimatisation to high altitudes, participants on this trip are likely to experience some symptoms of being at altitude. The Dossier pack we provide when you book your holiday includes comprehensive advice on safe travel at altitude. If you require further information or advice on travel at altitude prior to booking please contact the office to speak to an experienced member of our team. Alternatively we recommend www.medex.org.uk as a good source of information.

The nature of adventure travel

Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

Climate information



Extensions

Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at www.mountainkingdoms.com.



Hotel upgrades and extra nights in Bhutan

If you would like to upgrade your hotel during your holiday take a look at our selection of luxury properties in Bhutan such as Uma Paro or the Taj Tashi in Thimphu, you can download a leaflet from our website detailing all hotel options. We can also add additional nights in Bhutan at the start or end of your trip.



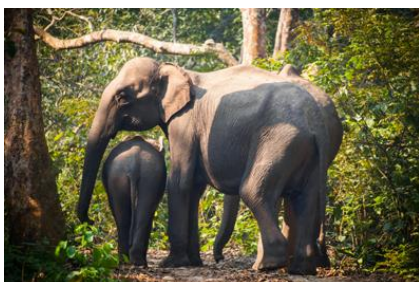
Additional accommodation in Nepal

If you would like to extend your stay in Nepal, you can add extra nights at your group tour accommodation or choose from our range of distinctive properties in Pokhara and the Kathmandu area. We can offer luxury resorts, heritage hotels, tranquil lodges and characterful cottages. Our selection includes Dwarika's Resort at Dhulikhel, Pavilions Himalaya at Pokhara, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge and Shivapuri Heights Cottage. Individual extension leaflets for all these options can be downloaded from our website or requested from our office.



Kathmandu Valley sightseeing excursions

We can arrange half day or full day sightseeing tours taking you to the key cultural attractions of central Kathmandu or the Kathmandu Valley including the World Heritage Sites of Bhaktapur and Patan. Your tour will be led by an English speaking guide and you will have a private vehicle and driver.



Wildlife extensions in Nepal - Chitwan, Bardia & Koshi Tappu

Visit Chitwan or Bardia National Parks home to a rich variety of birds and animals including elephant, rhinos, leopard and Bengal tiger. Stay in a comfortable lodge and enjoy a range of wildlife viewing activities. Alternatively visit the renowned Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve - one of the finest birdwatching and wildlife areas in all Asia.

Royal Manas National Park, Bhutan

Extend your stay in Bhutan with an extension to the Royal Manas National park, a wonderful birder's paradise close to the Indian border. Our extension package gives you three full days to explore the park and surrounding area, and you will be accompanied throughout by a specialist bird and wildlife guide. We also include all meals, private transport to/from Paro, and hotel accommodation close to the park.

Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

- Our unique itinerary contains three nights in Bhutanese farmhouse homestays giving you a more personal and authentic insight into Bhutan, its customs and its people.
- We have included the unusual Bumdra Trek to Taktsang with an overnight camp at the remote Bumdra temple.
- The holiday explores some of the lesser visited and extremely beautiful 'hidden valleys' with a range of varied and interesting walks.
- A visit to a Bhutanese festival has been included.
- Your trek will be led by a knowledgeable, well-trained English-speaking guide.
- We have been pioneering holidays in Bhutan for over 30 years. Our M.D. Steve Berry, is one of the leading authorities on Bhutan in the travel industry and has written two books about his experiences in the Thunder Dragon Kingdom.
- We have been working with our partners in Bhutan for many years. Their knowledge, experience and attention to detail means you can be assured of a very high quality holiday.
- Many members of the Mountain Kingdoms team have first-hand experience of Bhutan. Steve Berry researched this trip in 2017 and Niki Morgan has completed the Bumdra Trek. They would be very happy to answer any questions you may have.
- Our maximum group size is 12 for this trip. This provides for a genuine small group travel experience and helps reduce the negative aspects associated with larger groups.
- We offer a flexible service and can extend your holiday with extra hotel nights, upgrades and exciting activities.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights team for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

What our clients say



Having always harboured a desire to travel to Bhutan, but lacking the confidence to face the bewildering set of rules required to enter and stay in the country, we used Mountain Kingdoms to arrange the trip for us. Travelling as a couple, we joined a group of eight. The whole experience, from first contacting Mountain Kingdoms to arriving back from the trip, was excellent. Mountain Kingdoms adapted to our relatively late addition to the tour and gave sound advice as we prepared to travel. In-country, the quality of the itinerary was excellent and the expertise of the guides was incredibly impressive. We were looked after well, and they made sure we got the absolute most out of our limited time.

-Jamie, Bristol



A wonderful holiday. It was a perfect blend of tour and trek, culture and countryside.

-Jim Robertson, Scotland

It was well organised and all the stress was taken out of the holiday. The guide leader was probably the best guide we have ever had.

- Mr B Wilkins, Wiltshire



A fantastic way to explore Bhutan. We got a real insight into Bhutanese life by staying in the homesteads and attending the local festival.

-Angela Sycamore

This is a fabulous trip! The route is well planned which showcases much of the Khumbu region and takes you off the beaten track. It's tough and you need to be prepared to be cold and to rough it, as far as accommodation is concerned, but it's worth it. The scenery is amazing! All of the passes are superb. Purna (our head guide) and his team were brilliant - they worked so hard to ensure that we were all ok and had all we need. It was a highlight of the trip meeting them and getting to know them.

-Julie Reynolds, Kent

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

Complete financial security

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

No Surcharge Guarantee

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

Award winning Responsible Tourism

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at www.mountainkingdoms.com.

Genuine small group travel

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

Loyalty Discount

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

Comprehensive information

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit www.tourismdeclares.com

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

Carbon Offsetting

Already doing:

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

Will do:

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Already doing:

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

Will do:

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.



