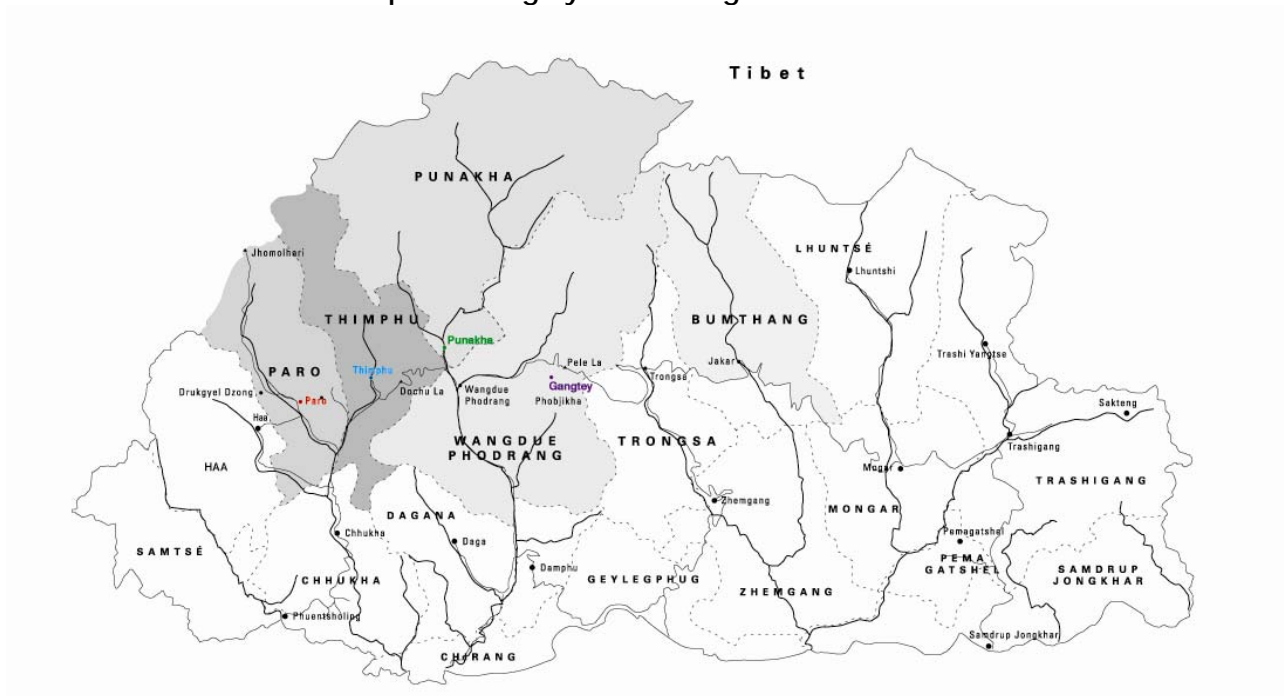


amankora

An Adventure in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

12-Night Amankora Journey Thimphu – Gangtey – Bumthang – Punakha – Paro



The tiny Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan awaits, nestled high in the Himalayas its isolation from the world has cultivated a culture rich in traditions, religion and a benevolent monarchy. The dramatic landscapes, from snow-capped peaks and deeply forested slopes to raging, boulder strewn rivers, sit largely undisturbed as the endeared environmental initiatives and religious beliefs leave the Kingdom pristine and a jewel of nature. The Amankora programme takes you into this ancient Kingdom for an adventure into the hearts and lands of charming farmers, fascinating weavers, enchanting monks and charismatic leaders.

Itinerary

Day 1	Arrival in Paro, o/n Paro
Day 2	Paro Valley exploration o/n Paro
Day 3	Paro to Punakha o/n Punakha
Day 4	Explore Punakha o/n Punakha
Day 5	Punakha to Bumthang o/n Bumthang
Day 6	Explore Bumthang Valley o/n Bumthang
Day 7	Explore Tang Valley – Bumthang district o/n Bumthang
Day 8	Explore Bumthang Valley and journey to Gangtey o/n Gangtey
Day 9	Exploring Phobjikha Valley o/n Gangtey
Day 10	Gangtey – Thimphu o/n Thimphu
Day 11	Tour of Thimphu o/n Thimphu
Day 12	Explore Paro o/n Paro
Day 13	International departure

Programme

Day 1: Arrival in Paro

Flying into Bhutan is a breathtaking experience with the mighty Himalayas dominating the horizon as you descend through richly forested mountains into the Paro Valley, the location of Bhutan's only airport. It is a short transfer to the Paro Lodge sitting adjacent to the ruins of one of the valleys most historically important *dzongs*. In the afternoon take a short walk to the nearby ruins, visit some of the valleys oldest and holiest religious monuments or take an easy stroll down Paro's Main Street. (*Overnight Amankora Paro*).

Day 2: Paro Valley exploration

In the morning visit Paro Dzong, a premier example of Bhutanese architecture. Just above, the Ta Dzong (watchtower) houses the National Museum which displays an intriguing collection of artefacts. Once back in Paro town visit the town's ancient temples, and perhaps view the ancient wall paintings at Dumtse Lhakhang. Stop for lunch in the rafters of a traditional farmhouse and experience Bhutanese living. In the afternoon go for a short hike to some of the nearby villages around Amankora Paro. (*Overnight Amankora Paro*).

Day 3: Paro to Punakha

Start the day with an early departure to Punakha. The journey will take you over the high mountain pass of Dochu La where on a clear day the highest peaks of Bhutan present themselves in grandeur. A picnic or tea may be a wonderful way to take in the surrounding Himalaya. Before arriving at the Punakha Lodge a short walk through the valley floor takes you to the Chimi Lhakhang, the auspicious fertility monastery built by the, "Divine Madman" in 1499. (*Overnight Amankora Punakha*).

Day 4: Explore Punakha Valley

Begin with a hike up through fields of chillies, cabbages and rice along the banks of the Mo Chhu to the upper end of the valley to the Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten, a stunning monument recently built by the Queens and consecrated in 1999. Returning down through the valley take in the impressive Punakha Dzong, home to the remains of Bhutan's first ruler, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, and the winter residence of the monastic order's leader and his entourage of monks. Later enjoy a picnic lunch on the banks of the Punak Chhu at a vantage point of the impressive *dzong* and confluence of the Mo Chhu (mother river) and Pho Chhu (father river). Following lunch a quick drive will take you to the village of Talo. Walk through the beautiful and quiet grounds of the village temple, perhaps visit the home village of the Kingdom's four Queens. (*Overnight Amankora Punakha*).

Day 5: Punakha to Bumthang

Today's journey onward to Jakar (Bumthang) is certainly memorable with dramatic landscapes of terraced farmland, deep river valleys and precariously perched farmhouses viewed from the only east-west highway that has been ingeniously carved out of the mountain face. Following a brief stop in Wangdiphodrang, carry on to a picnic stop close by to the auspicious Chendebji Chorten. Upon reaching Trongsa, stroll through this quaint village and, official business permitting, visit the Trongsa Dzong, ancestral home to Bhutan's monarch where you will often find novice monks reciting mantras or practicing their sacred instruments. The drive onward to Bumthang takes you over the picturesque Yotong La and down into the Chhume Valley, home of Bhutan's famous Yatra weaving. Browse the traditional textiles and perhaps see the weavers creating their intricate handiwork. (*Overnight Amankora Bumthang*).

Day 6: Explore Bumthang Valley

This morning you have at leisure and before lunch take time to explore the neighbouring palace, Wangdichoeling, home to the second King, and the auspicious prayer wheels next door. In the afternoon a range of excursions from short treks in the nearby pristine valleys to visits to some of Bhutan's most auspicious religious monuments will be available. (*Overnight Amankora Bumthang*).

Day 7: Explore Tang Valley – Bumthang district

Explore the Bumthang district with an excursion to the stunning Tang Valley. This seldom visited valley offers a treat in revealing some off the beaten track *lhakhangs* and monasteries, and the amazing museum at Ugen Choeling Palace. A short hike takes you up to this well preserved palace and its cultural treasures inside. Stop for a traditional picnic with breathtaking views of the untouched surroundings. (*Overnight Amankora Bumthang*).

Day 8: Explore Bumthang Valley and journey to Gangtey

Before beginning the return journey west, enjoy a morning visit to the sin alleviating Tamshing Monastery followed by quick visits to the valleys unique cottage industries – Red Panda Brewery, Bumthang Cheese/Dairy Facility and the Bumthang Distillery, home to numerous distinctive spirits. Passing back

through Chhume stop at the grounds and courtyard of Domkhar Trashis Chhoeling, the summer palace of the second King, and a nearby *lhakhang*, currently under renovation. Upon arrival in Gangtey, visit the striking Gangtey Goemba, sitting at the head of the valley and stroll through the quaint village. (*Overnight Amankora Gangtey*).

Day 9: Exploring Phobjikha Valley

Start with a visit to the Black Neck Crane Centre and dependent on the season, time spent in the centre's nearby hide is a must to view the breeding cranes. Various walks or a mountain bike ride through this magnificent valley can be arranged. Soaking up the beauty of the valley from the Lodge or returning to the revered Goemba for an audience with the Tulku. (*Overnight Amankora Gangtey*).

Day 10: Gangtey to Thimphu

Today's journey back to the capital is extensive, but break up the journey with a visit to a traditional farmhouse and perhaps a meal with the resident family. Upon arrival in Thimphu you can visit the National Textile Museum, Folk Heritage Museum, and perhaps even *kora* the Memorial Chorten. Dusk permitting, a short drive up to the BBS tower affords magnificent views across the Thimphu Valley. (*Overnight Amankora Thimphu*).

Day 11: Tour of Thimphu

This morning head to the north end of the valley stopping to view Tashichoe Dzong, the seat of Bhutan's government and royal offices, and continuing on past Dechenchoeling, residence of the Queen Mother. Just beyond Dechenchoeling visit Pangri Zampa, two 16th century buildings that were once the home of the Shabdrung and now house a monastic training school. At the head of the valley a 25-minute hike across one of the country's oldest cantilever bridges and up a steep trail leads to the 1620 Goemba where the Kingdom's first monk body was established. Heading back into Thimphu you will stop for lunch near the auspicious Dechenphu Lhakhang, home of Thimphu's protective deity. Travel into the capital stop at Dechenphodrang Lhakhang, home to the state monastic school and the Kingdom's first monastic body. Continuing back into town a visit to one of Bhutan's rare nunneries, Zilukha or Drubthob Goemba, is a must. Later in the afternoon visit the paper making factory or visit the tailor to be fitted for your striking *Gho* or *Kira*. (*Overnight Amankora Thimphu*).

Day 12: Explore Paro

On today's return to Paro, take a side excursion to either the recently opened Haa Valley or trek up to the Tiger's Nest viewpoint, or continue straight on to the Paro Lodge where other short hikes or excursions will be available. (*Overnight Amankora Paro*).

The Haa valley was recently opened to visitors and remains one of Bhutan's most pristine areas. At the Chuzom confluence the road quickly ascends along the dramatic Wang Chhu river valley where you will have time to view the remarkable Dobji Dzong and hike around its high ramparts. Quick visits to both Chhundu Lhakhang and Lhakhang Nagpo provide an interesting insight into the history of the valley and its religious founding. Take in the striking blue highlighted Wangchulo Dzong, built in 1915, which currently houses the Indian Military Training Team headquarters. The smooth winding road heading up out of valley reaches the Cheli La pass at 3,900m. Have lunch and enjoy the panoramic views on clear days of the higher, snow-capped Himalayas.

The hike up to one of Bhutan's most revered monuments, the Taktsang Goemba, can be strenuously afforded on foot or taken at a more leisurely pace on the back of an accommodating mule. The return four-hour trek offers spectacular views of the Tiger's Nest which literally hangs on the cliff face 900m above the valley floor. (*Overnight in Paro*).

Day 13: Departure Day

In the early morning leave for the airport. *Tashi Delek!*