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Magical Central Bhutan

Bhutan's tradition and culture are very much alive in its language & literature, arts & crafts, drama, music, architecture, and basic social interactions. Traditional age-old ceremonies, religious festivals, and belief systems continue to have a special significance in the daily lives of the people. The best way to relish the rich flora and fauna, culture and etiquette, people and lifestyle and to get a taste of the real Bhutan is through a cultural tour. In the comfort of your personal car or coach you drive scenic towns, villages and forests with comfortable nights in clean quality hotels approved by the Tourism Department for their standards. We will give you the best of Bhutan in comfort. Wherever possible we can organize cultural shows for you to heighten your experience and letting you get a feel of the Bhutanese hospitality. Better still, we can arrange for you to attend real festivals which are witnessed by many Bhutanese. The best way to do a cultural tour is to time your trip with the many festivals that take place all over Bhutan, all year round. Bhutanese festivals are truly unique. The religious dances at these festivals are attended by hundreds of devoted Bhutanese dressed in their beautiful multi-colored dresses. The Tshechus in Paro, Thimphu and Bumthang (including the Jambay Lhakhang Drub) are the some of the most popular ones.

Price:

Trip Start:

Trip Ends:

Duration: 10 Days

Grade: Easy

Altitude:

Destination:

Trip Style:

Transport:

Group Size: 1 - 40+

Best Time: Whole Year

Itinerary

Day	Title	Description
1	<u>Paro</u>	The flight to Bhutan offers scenic views of some world's highest peaks. Paro is at an altitude of 2280m above sea level and this valley serves as an ideal area for red rice, apple, wheat, potatoes and vegetable growing. Our representative will receive you at Paro airport, a short drive around the valley and to the hotel. Afternoon relaxing and visit to the Paro Dzong. Evening walk around the valley and night at Paro

Thimphu:
Sightseeing in
Thimphu valley;

Morning after breakfast a scenic drive to Bhutan's capital, Thimphu, which is about 90 minutes drive. Check in the hotel and after lunch begin the program. National Library, which holds a vast collection of ancient Buddhist texts and manuscripts, some dating back several hundred years, as well as modern academic books mainly on Himalayan culture and religion. Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as Painting School) where students undertake a six-year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan; Textile and Folk Heritage Museum: These museums, both of which opened in 2001, provide fascinating insights into Bhutanese material culture and way of life. National Memorial Chorten: The building of this landmark was envisaged by the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, as a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it is both a memorial to the Late King (“The Father of modern Bhutan”) and a monument to world peace. The paintings and statues inside the monument provide a deep insight into Buddhist philosophy. Trashichhodzong: This impressive fortress/monastery houses Secretariat building, the throne room of His Majesty, the King and various government offices. It is also the summer residence of Chief Abbot and central monk body. Handicrafts Emporium: This government-run enterprise displays a wide range of beautifully hand-woven textiles and craft products. It also carries a small collection of books on Bhutan, Buddhism and Himalayan culture. In the evening explore the vibrant Thimphu Bazaar. Weekend add-ons Visit Thimphu weekend market where farmers from all over Bhutan come to this market place to sell their products. It's an interesting place to visit, where village people jostle with well-heeled Thimphu residents for the best bargains on vegetables and foodstuffs.

- 3 Thimphu – Punakha
- Driving distance is about 3 hours. Leaving Thimphu the road climbs steeply through a forest of pine and cedar, festooned with hanging lichen high up near Dochula pass (3,050 m). This pass offers panoramic views of the Himalayan mountain ranges on clear weather. You will come across Rhododendron, Magnolia, Juniper and pine forest with chirping sounds of the many rare species of birds found in Bhutan. You will then be driven to Lobesa where you will make a hike to Chimi Lhakhang Temple. This temple is on a hill top and it is dedicated to the great Yogi known as Drukpa Kuenley or popularly known as “Divine madman” of the 14th century. It is believed that this temple blesses women who seek fertility. You will continue your drive north to visit the majestic Punakha Dzong, built in 1637 which strategically occupies the land between the two rivers Phochu and Mochu. At Present the Dzong serve as the district administration and judiciary office as well as the winter home for Bhutan’s spiritual leader Je Khenpo and the monks of Thimphu and Punakha.
- 4 Punakha – Trongsa
- Driving distance is approximately 6 hours. After early breakfast, drive to Wangdiphodrang and then continue on to Trongsa across Pele-la pass (3,300m/10,830ft). The pass is marked by a white chorten and many prayer flags. There is an abrupt change in vegetation at this point, with mountain forest replaced by high altitude dwarf bamboo. Stop at Chendebji Chorten for lunch. You can see the chorten with eyes painted at the four cardinal points. It was built in the 18th century by Lama Shida from Tibet, to cover the remains of evil spirit that was subdued at this spot. Finally reaching towards Trongsa you can view the stunning Trongsa Dzong from a distance.

Trongsa (2300m) literally meaning new town forms the central hub of the nation and historically the place from where attempts at unifying the country were launched. The first and the second king had ruled the country from Trongsa. The crown prince of Bhutan holds the position of the Trongsa penlop(governor) prior to ascending the throne. Visit Trongsa Dzong built in 1648. It is the biggest of all the fortresses in the country. It is the most impressive and aesthetic with magnificent work of tradition architecture in the Kingdom. It was the seat of power over central and eastern Bhutan. This Dzong is the ancestral home of Bhutan`s royal family. Both the first and second Kings of Bhutan ruled the country from this ancient seat. All five Kings were invested as Trongsa Penlop (‘governer’) prior to ascending the throne. The monastic body shifts to Trongsa for the winter and to Bumthang in the summer. Above the town is Ta Dzong(watch tower) presently it is under renovation works to make way for the new Museum on Bhutanese Monarchy. After the tour of Trongsa, drive to Bumthang, 68 km away from Trongsa, a journey of about 3 hours, over the Yutong-la pass (3,400m). The road winds steeply up to the pass, 28 km from Trongsa, then runs down through coniferous forest into a wide, open cultivated valley known as the Chumey valley. Stop in Chumey village there are many shops selling yathra, a woolen textile. Bumthang is famous for; yathra is a distinctive strip of woven woolen fabric in numerous colours and patterns mostly made using ancient dyeing techniques .The Road follows the valley down and it climbs through blue pine forests to Kiki La (2860m). Then descent down to the Choekor Valley or central Bumthang.

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| 6 | <u>Bumthang</u> | <p>Bumthang valley is comprised of the combination of four valleys – Chumey, Choekhor, Tang and Ura with altitude varying from 2,600m to 4,000m. It is home to many of prominent Buddhist temples and monasteries and it is also the traditional home to the great Buddhist teacher, Pema Lingpa to whose descendants the present dynasty traces its origin. Jakar Dzong built in 1667 and it's seat of district administration and regional monastic body of Bumthang. Jambay Lhakhang founded in 7th century by the Tibetan king Songsen Gampo and it is one of the oldest monasteries in the country. Kurje Lhakhang, where the patron saint of Buddhism in Bhutan subdued a local demon and left his body imprint. Tamshing founded in 1501 by Terton(Treasure Reveler) Pema Lingpa , the incarnation of Guru Rinpoche .The monastery has very ancient religious paintings like 1000 Buddhas and 21 Taras (female form of Buddhisattvas) in Bhutan. Visit a nearby farmers house for refreshments and observe the traditional way of living. Visit Swiss farm. The farm produces both cottage and Swiss cheese, honey and a large variety of fruit juice and spirits. The Brewery that manufactures the famous Red Panda beer (Weiss beer) is also located here. Leisurely walk in chamkhar town. Option : Nature drive to see the burning lake (me-bar tsho) Explore the village of Ura Visit to Ugencholing Palace and Museum</p> |
| 7 | <u>Bumthang-
Gangtey/Phobjikha</u> | <p>Driving time is approx 7 Hours. Drive to the glacial valley of Phobjikha. On the slopes of valley the great monastery of Gangtey is situated, established in the 17th century. The village of Phobjikha lies a few km, down from the monastery, on the valley floor. This quite, remote valley is the winter home of black necked cranes, which migrate from the plains of Tibet in the north, to pass the winter months in a milder climate. Explore Gangtey village and Phobjikha valley. The unique black necked crane festival is held on the valley floor every November.</p> |
| 8 | <u>Gangtey/
Phobjikha – Paro</u> | <p>Retrace the route back to Paro. Evening at leisure or Paro cultural sightseeing.</p> |

- 9 Paro EXCURSION TO TAKTSANG MONASTERY Day Hike or Mule ride to Taktsang Monastery. One of the most venerated places in Bhutan precariously perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. Guru Rinpoche arrived at spot on a back of tigress and meditated here in a cave and hence it is called 'Tiger's Nest'. This site has been recognized as the most spiritual of sites in Bhutan and many eminent saints have meditated in this area. Now it is visited by all Bhutanese at least once in their life time. Lunch and refreshments at the cafeteria which offers an imposing view of the cultural landmark.
- 10 Paro – Airport Paro – Airport