



## BHUTAN

DAY 1

### PARO & THIMPHU, BHUTAN

Fly to Paro, where you receive a *tashi khadda* (traditional welcome). Known to locals as the “Land of the Peaceful Dragon,” Bhutan is a country of sprawling forests, venerated monasteries, lush green valleys, and age-old spiritual and medicinal practices. Its people are hardworking, vividly attired and deeply religious. Continue overland to Thimphu, past forests, fields and rivers. En route, visit Simtokha Dzong —built in 1629 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who unified Bhutan. After checking in to your hotel, enjoy the remainder of the day at leisure.

DAY 2

### THIMPHU | EXPLORING THE CAPITAL

Take a scenic drive to visit the Buddha Dordenma, a massive, golden statue that sits atop a gilded meditation hall at Kuensel Phodrang, and take in panoramic views of Thimphu and the surrounding mountains. Continue to the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, a working herbal medicine hospital to discover how it collects and dispenses medicinal plants abundant in the Bhutanese Himalaya. After lunch at your hotel, visit 16th-century, riverside Pangri Zampa, a monastery complex housing Bhutan's most notable college for traditional astrology. Upon arrival, practice meditation with an expert and join an astrologer for a reading. Time permitting, visit Buddhist Tashichho Dzong, a monastery and fortress set on the western bank of the Wang Chu River.

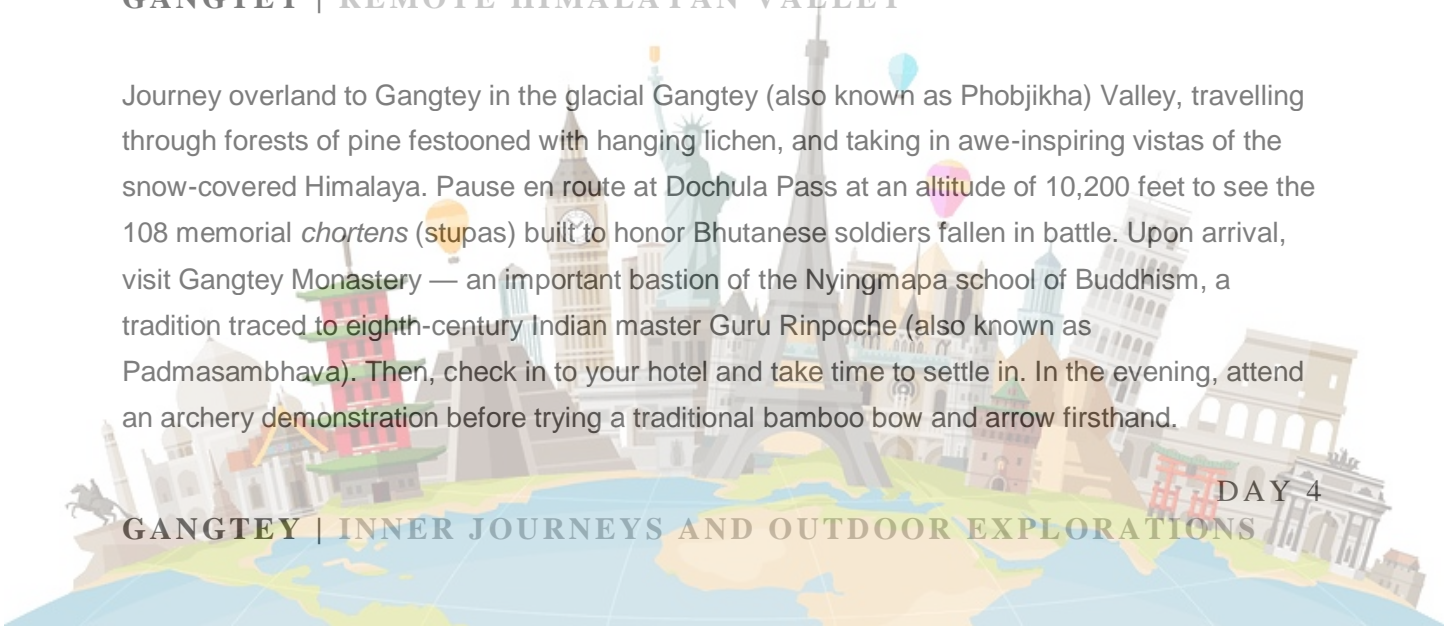
DAY 3

### GANGTEY | REMOTE HIMALAYAN VALLEY

Journey overland to Gangtey in the glacial Gangtey (also known as Phobjikha) Valley, travelling through forests of pine festooned with hanging lichen, and taking in awe-inspiring vistas of the snow-covered Himalaya. Pause en route at Dochula Pass at an altitude of 10,200 feet to see the 108 memorial *chortens* (stupas) built to honor Bhutanese soldiers fallen in battle. Upon arrival, visit Gangtey Monastery — an important bastion of the Nyingmapa school of Buddhism, a tradition traced to eighth-century Indian master Guru Rinpoche (also known as Padmasambhava). Then, check in to your hotel and take time to settle in. In the evening, attend an archery demonstration before trying a traditional bamboo bow and arrow firsthand.

DAY 4

### GANGTEY | INNER JOURNEYS AND OUTDOOR EXPLORATIONS





Begin the day on a spiritual note when you visit a *shedra*, a Tibetan Buddhist place of learning. Join monks for a Tara Puja ceremony (morning prayers), offered at a time when the body and mind are considered most pure. Then, make morning rounds alongside a monk-teacher and witness monk-novices prepare for their studies. After lunch, set out on a scenic hike or mountain-biking excursion along the Gangtey Nature Trail, traversing a pine forest and reveling in spectacular views of the valley. Next, visit the Black-Necked Crane Center, which is devoted to protecting and rehabilitating the endangered species that migrates annually from the Tibetan Plateau, and learn why local farmers consider them good luck. For the best opportunity to see the striking, four-foot-tall birds in person, plan to visit between November and February. In the evening, attend a calming meditation session at a local *shedra*, before participating in evening prayers and conversing with monks.

DAY 5

### PUNAKHA | LEGEND OF THE DIVINE MADMAN

Depart for Punakha, former capital of Bhutan, set in a fertile, picturesque valley at the confluence of the Mo Chhu (Mother River) and Pho Chhu (Father River). En route, take a short hike to Chimi Lhakhang. Perched on a round hillock flanked by prayer flags, this Buddhist monastery is dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kunley, a 15th-century Tibetan Buddhist saint, also called “the Divine Madman,” who is remembered for his unorthodox teaching style. Adorned with fertility and phallic symbols, the monastery is a long-established pilgrimage destination, particularly for women and couples seeking a blessing for successful childbearing. Stroll through the temple grounds, free to speak with the monks who abide there. Continue to your hotel for lunch and time at leisure, opting perhaps for a spa appointment.

DAY 6

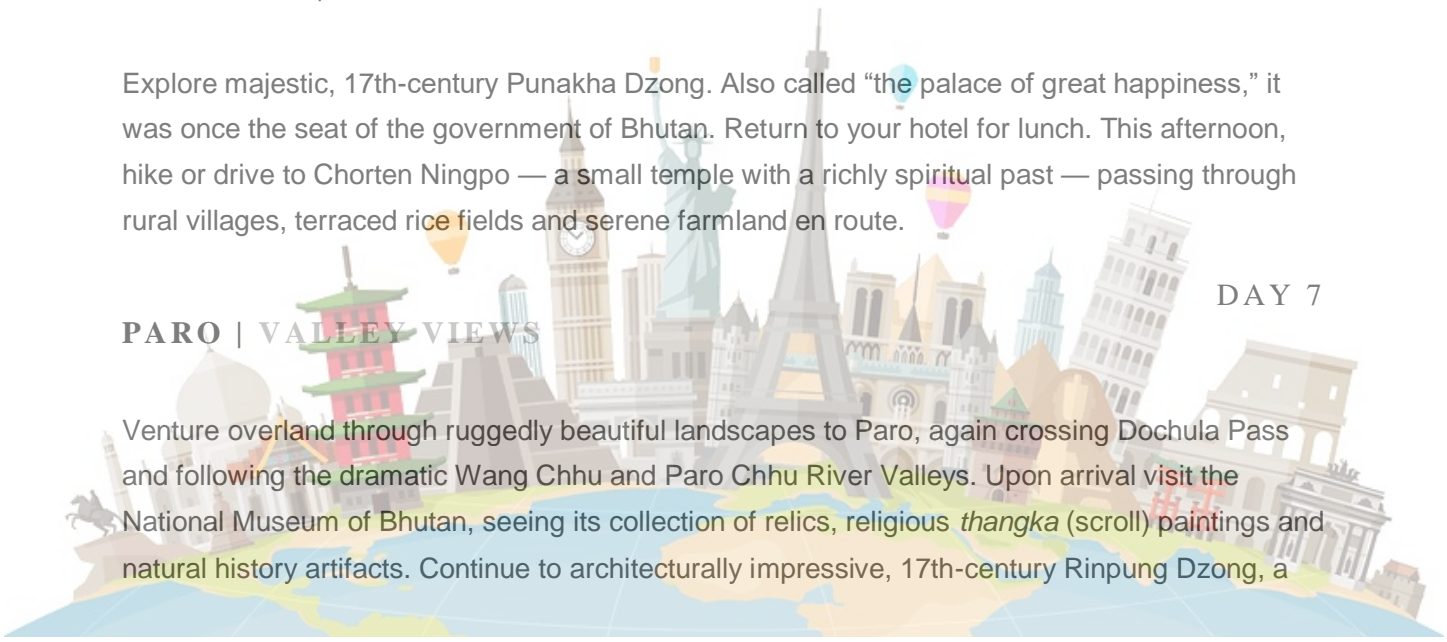
### PUNAKHA | “PALACE OF GREAT HAPPINESS”

Explore majestic, 17th-century Punakha Dzong. Also called “the palace of great happiness,” it was once the seat of the government of Bhutan. Return to your hotel for lunch. This afternoon, hike or drive to Chorten Ningpo — a small temple with a richly spiritual past — passing through rural villages, terraced rice fields and serene farmland en route.

DAY 7

### PARO | VALLEY VIEWS

Venture overland through ruggedly beautiful landscapes to Paro, again crossing Dochula Pass and following the dramatic Wang Chhu and Paro Chhu River Valleys. Upon arrival visit the National Museum of Bhutan, seeing its collection of relics, religious *thangka* (scroll) paintings and natural history artifacts. Continue to architecturally impressive, 17th-century Rinpung Dzong, a





former meeting hall that now houses both the district monastic body and government offices, including the local courts.

DAY 8

## PARO | ASCENDING “TIGER’S NEST”

Embark on a challenging hike to one of Bhutan’s most revered icons, Taktsang Monastery (“Tiger’s Nest”), which clings to a cliff 3,000 feet above the valley floor. Take in the views at this sacred site, where the great tantric mystic Guru Rinpoche is believed to have flown on the back of the tiger to bring the teachings of the Buddhist Dharma to Bhutan. Descend down the mountain to enjoy a private tented picnic lunch, complete with Champagne and a private music performance from local musicians. In the late afternoon, visit quiet, peaceful Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan’s oldest and most sacred shrines, where you make a butter lamp offering.

DAYS 9

## DEPART BHUTAN

Departure from Bhutan

