



Laya - Gasa trek: October/November 2011

<p>DAY 1 Thursday 27th Oct</p>	<p>Arrive at Paro International Airport from Delhi, Kathmandu or Bangkok. Paro is situated in a beautiful valley and is a fitting introduction to this charming kingdom. Your tour guide will meet you and take you to your hotel. In the afternoon we will visit the impressive Paro Rinpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture. Afterwards if you wish to you can visit the 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang, a temple of historical significance and one of the most sacred shrines in Bhutan. Overnight in Paro.</p>
<p>DAY 2 Friday 28th Oct</p>	<p>To help you acclimatise for the trek take a day walk to the 'Tiger's Nest', the sacred Taktshang monastery which clings to the rock face 900 metres above the valley floor. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site riding on a tigress. He subsequently meditated here for three months. It is one of Bhutan's most holy sites and draws pilgrims not only from Bhutan but also from neighbouring Buddhist countries. You can have lunch at the Taktshang cafeteria from where you get a spectacular view of the monastery. This evening you can sort out your luggage for the trek. Anything you don't need to carry with you will be driven safely to Punakha to await your arrival. Overnight in Paro.</p>
<p>DAY 3 Saturday 29th Oct</p>	<p>LAYA - GASA TREK: DRUKGYEL DZONG TO DAMJI.</p> <p>Day 1. Paro to Shana. Drive to the end of the road at Drukgyel Dzong where the trek begins. While we are waiting for the ponies to load up there will be time to visit the ruined Dzong constructed to commemorate the victory over Tibetan invaders in 1644 and destroyed by a butter lamp fire in 1951. Today's trail follows the river uphill through a cultivated valley. After about 3 hours' walk we stop for lunch by a bridge across the river next to a chorten. Soon we enter the forest, passing several small hamlets with houses built in traditional style. After passing through Shana village and crossing the river on a cantilever bridge, we camp by a stone shelter in a meadow at about 2800 metres. (17 km, 6 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 4 Sunday 30th Oct</p>	<p>Day 2. Shana to Soi Thangthangka. We ascend through the river valley and beautiful pine and rhododendron forests. We stop for lunch by the first bridge over the river and then continue to follow the right bank for a couple of hours until we reach a junction of two valleys, marked by a stupa. Here we turn north towards Mount Jomolhari, which can be seen from the top of the valley. Our camp will be at 3680 metres. (19 km, 8 to 9 hours)</p>

<p>DAY 5 Monday 31st Oct</p>	<p>Day 3. Soi Thangthangka to Jangothang. The path passes a small, border army post where the valley begins to widen again and we leave the forest behind. Enjoy views of snow-capped peaks, high mountain ridges and yaks and yak herders. We will stop for lunch in a small hamlet where the family will welcome us. From here it is not far to reach camp, which is in a beautiful grassy meadow beneath a ruined fortress at the base of Mount Jomolhari (4040 m). (19 km, 6 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 6 Tuesday 1st Nov</p>	<p>Day 4. Rest day at Jomolhari base camp. An opportunity to explore the glacier, do some washing in the stream (icy cold!) or just take it easy. If you feel like going further afield the guide will discuss the options with you.</p>
<p>DAY 7 Wednesday 2nd Nov</p>	<p>Day 5. Jangothang to Lingshi. The trail climbs gradually and then more steeply to Nyeli La (4850 m). On the way you will be rewarded when you stop for breath with tremendous views toward Jomolhari and Jitchu Drake. If the weather is clear, Lingshi Dzong can be clearly seen as we descend into the Lingshi basin, and Tserim Kang with its glaciers can be seen to the north. Follow the ridge for a long way until you drop through the forests to our camp just outside Lingshi village beside a stone shelter at 3915 metres. (19 km, 7 to 8 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 8 Thursday 3rd Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 6. Rest day at Lingshi. A splendid opportunity to visit the remote Lingshi Dzong and also spend some time at the local school where the children will be excited to see you – many of them yak herders’ children who are sent to board while their parents are up at higher altitudes with the yaks – but you will also see plenty of yaks here! You will get a good feel for the way of life in these remote mountain villages.</p>
<p>DAY 9 Friday 4th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 7 Lingshi to Chebisa. This is one of the shortest trekking days. Before we set off there should be time for a visit to Lingshi Dzong and a quick tour of the village. Then we start walking once more on a path along the hillside with views across the valley. A couple of hours later you will catch a splendid view of Tserim Kang, before descending to Gang Yul (‘village at the pass’), a picturesque village of about 150 people. From here it is only an hour or so on a path which runs along the hillside until we reach our camp at Chebisa (3910 m), where it is possible to visit some village houses and a waterfall just behind the village. (10 km, 5 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 10 Saturday 5th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 8. Chebisa to Shomuthang. The trail climbs gradually at first, getting steeper and steeper through wild pastures where yaks graze. You may also catch sight of blue sheep and eagles. Eventually we cross Gobu La (4350 m). From here it is a short walk down through rhododendron forest to the stream where we will stop for lunch. The afternoon’s walk is through pine and rhododendron forest, descending to the river from where the path traverses the hillside before climbing steeply once more to reach Shomuthang (3985 m). The camp is near a tributary to the Mo <i>Chu</i>, which emerges below the Gasa Tsachu (Hot Spring). From here you can see the helipad, sometimes used if the passes get snowed in. (17 km, 7 hours)</p>

<p>DAY 11 Sunday 6th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 9. Shomuthang to Robluthang. We start with a climb to Jhari La (4600 m) where we are rewarded with quite stunning views, then descend again through forest to Tsharithang, the valley where herds of takin can normally be seen. Today's scenery is absolutely breathtaking. Cross the river and clamber up the hillside for an hour or so to camp at Robluthang (4160 m). (18 km, 7 to 8 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 12 Monday 7th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 10. Robluthang to Limithang. Above camp the yak trail which is our path today can be seen, taking us through a hanging valley and past a yak herder's hut after about two hours' walk. From here we take the left side of the valley and soon the Shinge La comes into view. It is a tough climb to the pass, which marks the boundary of the Laya district (4870 m). From here the path descends rapidly through the valley to a huge bank of moraine on the edge of a lake, and behind the Kang Che Da ('Great Tiger Mountain') can be seen. We camp here in a meadow by the river at Limithang in the Laya district, where the locals will be seen wearing unique regional dress (4090 m). (19 km, 8 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 13 Tuesday 8th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 11. Limithang to Laya. The path goes downhill at first through a winding river valley with forest of spruce and juniper. We climb gradually from the river until we enter the eastern end of Laya village (3820 m). (10 km, 5 to 6 hours). This afternoon it will be possible to visit village houses and meet the friendly local people who will be pleased to offer you some yak butter tea. Women of Laya wear special dress and bamboo hats, both of which are decorated with turquoise and silver ornaments. An evening of dances performed by local women can be arranged.</p>
<p>DAY 14 Wednesday 9th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 12. Laya to Koena. The trail follows the river valley and there is a breathtaking view of vibrant rivers, feeder streams and waterfalls. At Koena there is a hut to sleep in which is sometimes welcome if the fields are muddy. (3510 m, 19 km, 7 to 8 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 15 Thursday 10th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 13. Koena to Gasa. We cross the Bale La Pass (3740 m), after which the trail descends to the camp near Gasa Dzong (2900 m). (14 km, 6 to 7 hours)</p>
<p>DAY 16 Friday 11th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 14. Gasa to Gasa Tsachu. After a late breakfast, we carry on down a long and steep path to the Gasa hot spring, or <i>tsachu</i>, taking some time to relax here after lunch. The spring is believed to be effective in curing various ailments including aching joints, and many Bhutanese families visit every winter. There are four pools, with temperatures ranging from warm to hot.</p>
<p>DAY 17 Saturday 12th Nov</p>	<p>TREK DAY 15. Gasa Tsachu to Geon Damji and return to Punakha. Walk through rolling hillsides with vistas of fields, villages and oak and pine forests. The trail descends from the high agricultural terraces above the Mo Chu into a semi-tropical gorge, ending at Damji. (17 km, 6 hours). A car will meet us at the road head to drive to Punakha.</p>

<p>DAY 18 Sunday 13th Nov</p>	<p>This morning you can visit the imposing Punakha Dzong, "Palace of Great Happiness". Built in 1637, it is strategically placed at the confluence of two rivers, the Po Chu and the Mo Chu. Then return to Thimphu over the Dochu La pass at 3050 metres. Later we may drive up to the Radio Tower (offering splendid views of the city from a hilltop festooned with prayer flags), and visit the Takin Reserve showcasing the unique national animal, the Takin. Overnight in Thimphu.</p>
<p>DAY 19 Monday 14th Nov</p>	<p>Thimphu sightseeing. We will visit the revered Memorial Chorten, the National Library and the School of Traditional Arts. You could visit Changangkha temple, perched on the hill top overlooking the town. Devotees flock throughout the day to circumambulate and turn the prayer wheels. The temple also contains beautiful wall paintings and hundreds of religious scriptures written in gold. In the afternoon you can take in more of the sights and culture of the capital, perhaps browse the striking collection of intricate textiles at the National Textile Museum or visit the Folk Heritage Museum. Overnight in Thimphu.</p>
<p>DAY 20 Tuesday 15th Nov</p>	<p>Early morning your guide will accompany you to the airport to see you off onto your flight and wish you Tashi Delek (goodbye and good luck).</p>