



Arts and Crafts of Bhutan – Discovery Tour of west, central and north east Bhutan – 15 days

There are 13 traditional arts and crafts (Zorig Chusum) in Bhutan, which have been passed down over the generations since the 15th century and are actively maintained today. Zorig Chusum refers to activities which assist, teach or uplift others.

Shingzo (Carpentry) – involved in everything from building dzongs and Bhutanese homes to tools and everyday objects.

Dozo (Masonry) – including the building of stupas, dzongs and temples as well more functional items like millstones.

Parzo (Carving) – in wood, stone and slate. Seen in the wooden printing blocks used to print sacred texts and carvings in stupas.

Lhazo (Painting) – including drawing and painting, most famously thangkas (religious pictures), murals and frescoes in temples and dzongs and the brightly coloured paintings on the outside of Bhutanese homes.

Jinzo (Sculpture) – usually in clay, the Bhutanese are skilled in creating statues and ritual items like masks worn at festival time.

Lugzo (Casting) – usually in bronze, to produce musical instruments, statues, tools and utensils.

Gazo (Blacksmithing) – to produce practical items like axes and chains.

Troko (Gold and Silver-smithing) – in gold, silver and copper.

Tshazo (Bamboo work) – to make bowls and other containers for the storage of food and drink and, of course, the traditional bow and arrow.

Thagzo (Weaving) – from the preparation of the yarn to dyeing and weaving.

Tshemzo (Embroidery) – there are 2 main types; sewn and embroidered clothing and thangkas or appliqué and patchwork items made from stitching cloth together. This includes the traditional boots worn with the gho on official occasions and the thongdrels unfurled at festivals.

Shagzo (Woodturning) – to produce bowls, plates and the drums used during religious ceremonies

Dezo (Papermaking) – the traditional way of making paper from the daphne plant.

DAY 1	<p>Arrive at Paro International Airport from Delhi, Calcutta, Kathmandu or Bangkok. Paro is situated in a beautiful valley at 2280 metres and is a fitting introduction to this charming kingdom. Your guide will meet you and take you on a short one-hour drive along the Paro and Thimphu river valleys to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital, at 2320 metres. You can stop on the way to take in the magnificent Tamchhog Lhakhang, the hereditary place of worship for Bhutan's iron bridge builder. Take a late afternoon walk around town and soak in the atmosphere of this magical capital with its busy shops and bazaars and photogenic citizens in national dress.</p> <p>Overnight in Thimphu</p>
DAY 2	<p>Thimphu sightseeing. Today we will introduce you to all of Bhutan's traditional crafts. In the morning we will visit the School of Traditional Arts where students are taught the 13 traditional arts, including painting, embroidery, woodcarving, mask-making and statue-making. You are welcome to watch the students at work. We will then visit the National Textile museum to browse the striking collection of intricate textiles and watch a short film introducing the various styles, designs and techniques. You may then like to visit the Folk Heritage Museum to see a traditional Bhutanese farmhouse and how some of the traditional crafts were put to use. Later we will explore the modern day practice of traditional crafts with a visit to the Gagyel Lhundrup Weaving Centre in Changzamto where you can watch women weaving intricate fabric for the traditional Bhutanese dress of gho (for men) and kira (for women). You may like to browse through their pleasant showroom, which displays the finished articles. If you are interested there is a local incense factory in the same area where you can watch how the herbs are mixed, ground, coloured and formed into incense sticks. We will then visit the Goldsmiths workshop where you can watch metalworking. The craftspeople here make sacred objects to decorate temples and Dzongs, such as the Serto (golden pinnacle), which you will see in the middle of the roof of all temples and Dzongs. They also make smaller objects used in religious rituals, jewellery and metal tools used by the Bhutanese people for everyday tasks. If there is time we will visit the Choki Traditional Art School in the village of Kabesa, 10km north of Thimphu, which trains disadvantaged young people in the traditional arts of painting, sculpture and carving.</p> <p>Overnight in Thimphu</p>

<p>DAY 3 (Saturday)</p>	<p>Thimphu sightseeing. This morning we will see some of Bhutan's traditional crafts in their traditional home – Bhutan's temples and dzongs. We will visit Changangkha temple, perched on the hilltop 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. We will then visit Simtokha Dzong, widely considered to be the first dzong built in Bhutan. The dzong contains a line of over 300 fine slate carvings depicting saints and philosophers and the dark murals inside the central temple are some of the oldest and most beautiful in Bhutan.</p> <p>In the afternoon, we will visit the Jungshi Handmade Paper factory, which produces traditional Bhutanese paper from the daphne bush. You can watch the process of cooking and soaking the daphne bark before forming it into sheets of beautiful paper for pressing and drying. Again, a small showroom on site displays the finished articles, including sheets of paper, notebooks and beautiful paintings done on traditional paper. We will then spend the rest of the afternoon browsing the bustling weekly market. Your guide will talk you through the foods on offer at the market and you might like to browse the fragrant incense stalls. You can then explore the wonderful craft market on the west bank of the river – where you can find prayer flags, prayer wheels, beautiful textiles and jewellery.</p> <p>In the later afternoon we will visit Tashicho Dzong, built in 1641, which housed the original National Assembly and is now home to Government offices, the throne room and offices of the King. The Dzong was renovated and enlarged in the 1960s by the royal architect in traditional fashion, without using nails or architectural plans, the utse (central tower) and its chapels are older.</p> <p>Overnight in Thimphu</p>
<p>DAY 4</p>	<p>Thimphu to Punakha. In the morning drive approximately 3 hours to the old capital, Punakha, via Dochu La pass at 3050 metres, where we will stop for a hot drink and enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalaya ranges. We will stop at the Dochu La resort where the proprietor (a graduate of the School of Traditional Arts) makes thangkhas and watch the students at work in their small studio. If you are lucky, you might see them making a thongdrel, the huge banner for temples and dzongs, which is unveiled on the last day of a festival.</p> <p>You will notice the change of climate and vegetation as we approach low-lying Punakha at 1250 metres. In the afternoon 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. You may be interested to view an exhibition of traditional Bhutanese cantilever bridges (known as bazams) in the tower of the Puna Mo Chu Bazam. Then take a pleasant walk for an hour or so across terraced fields to Chimi Lhakhang (Temple of Fertility) built in the 15th century by the 'Divine Madman' (Lama Drukpa Kuenley). Stop to admire the traditional fertility paintings on the walls of houses in the nearby village.</p> <p>Overnight in Punakha</p>

<p>DAY 5</p>	<p>Drive approximately 4.5 hours to Trongsa, the gateway to central Bhutan at 2180 metres. Set amidst spectacular scenery, Trongsa Dzong commands the eye from miles away. We will stop at the viewpoint opposite the Dzong for lunch then take the 2 hour Mangdue Foot Trail down the valley side, walking through thick mixed forest, across a traditional cantilevered bridge over the river and up the other side of the valley, entering the Dzong at its western gate. If you are lucky you might see the rare golden langur (an arboreal monkey). This route was used historically by all the people travelling from one Dzongkhag to another. We will explore the rambling complex of the dzong with its many temples and then visit the Tower of Trongsa Museum in the nearby Ta Dzong, which focuses on the history of the Bhutanese monarchy and Buddhist art and features personal belongings of the Kings and Queens of Bhutan.</p> <p>Overnight in Trongsa</p>
<p>DAY 6</p>	<p>This morning we will drive for a further 2.5 hours through some of Bhutan's most beautiful landscapes to Bumthang, the collective name for an area of 4 valleys - Chokhor, Tang, Ura and Chhume at 2580 to 3100 metres. We will stop on the way at Zungney village in Chhume. Here you can watch women weaving the traditional yathras, hand-woven wool strips with geometric patterns. These are used locally to produce blankets and bedcovers or are made into warm jackets for the cold winters. You might be interested to browse the local shops that sell the yathras directly from the makers. Bumthang is the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, with its many legendary monasteries, temples and palaces. After lunch in Jakar town, your guide will take you on a fascinating tour of a variety of sacred sites in the valley including Jamba Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang and Tamshing Lhakhang. Later visit Bhutan's largest Dzong (Jakar), with its picturesque location overlooking the Chokhor valley.</p> <p>Overnight in Bumthang</p>
<p>DAY 7</p>	<p>Drive to Tang valley, the most remote of Bumthang's valleys. The road climbs past the trail to Membar Tsho (the burning lake), which is one of Bhutan's most important pilgrimage sites. Then on to Drangchel, Pema Lingpa's birthplace. You will also see some picturesque villages and temples and can walk up to visit Ugyenchholing Palace, which is now a museum and gives an interesting insight into life in an aristocratic family in the last century.</p> <p>Return to Bumthang for the night</p>
<p>DAY 8</p>	<p>Bumthang to Lhuntse. Today we will be driving approximately seven hours through stunning scenery to Lhuntse, including a crossing of the Thrumshing La pass (3750m). We also drive through deep forest. You will notice the change in vegetation as we enter warmer climes and will see lots of birds along the way as this is a renowned area for bird watching. Initially you will be taking the route to Mongar but before you reach there you will turn north and drive about two hours further to the isolated district of Lhuntse (the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family) where we will stay in a guest house. You will have time to visit the remote but impressive Dzong, which overlooks the valley with near vertical drops on all sides.</p> <p>Overnight in Lhuntse</p>

DAY 9	<p>Today we will drive for 30 minutes to Kurizampa Bridge and from there we will walk to Khoma, a traditional weaving village. Khoma produces some of Bhutan's most expensive weavings and nearly all houses in the village have looms. In this place, unusually, the men will do the household tasks such as cooking and cleaning for their wives. Although traditionally this is all women's work, things are done differently here so that the family can benefit from the income that can be made from the weaving activity. In the early days the women used to weave only for themselves and their families, but now they will take their products to Thimphu to sell and they can get high prices as one piece of cloth can take up to 3 months to finish because of the intricate patterns. From Khoma we will take a tour of some other weaving villages including Gonpokarpo, Chenling, Minje and Nyilamdun.</p> <p>Return to Lhuntse for the night</p>
DAY 10	<p>Today we drive back to Bumthang. On the way we will stop to visit Ura village, quite a large village situated at 3100m and dominated by its temple. Ura is in the highest of Bumthang's valleys and is believed to be the home of the earliest inhabitants in Bhutan. The village has about 40 houses closely set along cobbled streets, giving it a medieval atmosphere.</p> <p>Overnight in Bumthang</p>
DAY 11	<p>Drive approximately 5-6 hours to Gangtey at 2900 metres. Enjoy the views of the immense and remote Phobjikha valley and the black mountain ranges. Visit Gangtey Gomba, one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries. From here, you may like to take the short Gangtey Nature Trail walk (1.5 hours approximately) from Gangtey Gomba through the Phobjikha valley. This is the site where black-necked cranes visit in their hundreds in November each year after spending the summer in Tibet.</p> <p>Overnight in Gangtey</p>
DAY 12	<p>This morning we will visit the small Wangmo hand-woven carpet factory, established by a local woman, which trains local girls in carpet making. We will then return to Paro, a drive of approximately 7 hours, via Wangdi. Wangdi (also known as Wangdue Phodrang) was originally considered Bhutan's secondary capital and it commands an important central position. Sadly Wangdi Dzong was gutted by fire in June 2012, destroying in a few hours not only a magnificent building that had stood proudly for hundreds of years, but also the painstaking work that had been in progress for many months to rebuild recent earthquake damage using traditional construction methods. There is little now to see in Wangdi and after a brief stop for lunch continue on your way.</p> <p>Overnight in Paro</p>

DAY 13	<p>This morning you can visit the impressive Paro Rinpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture. You can also visit the National Museum. This was previously housed in the Ta Dzong (watch tower) built on top of the hill above Rinpung Dzong to defend Rinpung Dzong and the Paro valley during times of war, in an unusual circular construction resembles a conch shell. Unfortunately, an earthquake in September 2011 damaged the Ta Dzong and the contents of the museum were moved to a neighbouring building. You can still see a magnificent collection of Bhutanese artefacts – costumes, religious paintings, arms, textiles and a fascinating collection of Bhutan stamps. The National Museum is due to reopen in the Ta Dzong in 2015. In the afternoon you can visit the ruined Drukgyel Dzong (fortress of victory), constructed to commemorate the victory over Tibetan invaders in 1644 and destroyed by a butter lamp fire in 1951. Nearby you can also visit the 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang, a temple of historical significance and one of the most sacred shrines in Bhutan.</p> <p>Overnight in Paro</p>
DAY 14	<p>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. On the way back you can visit Dumtse Lhakhang, a temple built by Thangtong Gyalpo, the iron bridge builder.</p> <p>Overnight in Paro</p>
DAY 15	<p>Early in the 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>