

BHUTAN – SAMPLE CAS ITINERARY

Day 1 : Arrival Paro – Thimphu

Your journey begins with the most spectacular of all mountain flights. You will fly over the southern hills, known as 'dwars', or gateways into the Himalayas as they rise from the plains until they meet the great snow-capped peaks of the inner Himalayas that rise up to the sky. On a clear day, the flight to Paro is breathtaking, with views of major Himalayan peaks such as Everest, Kanchenjunga and Makalu, and on the final approach Bhutan's own snowy peaks including the sacred Jhomolhari, Jichu Drake and Tserimgang.

Estimated arrival time : 8.50 am (for the flight from Bangkok).

There are also direct flights to Paro from :

- Kathmandu :
- Dhaka :
- Bagdogra :
- Kolkata :
- Gaya :
- Delhi :
- Singapore :

On arrival at Paro airport and after completion of airport formalities, you will be met by your Bhutanese guide and driver who will be accommodating you throughout your Bhutan Tour. Drive from Paro to Thimphu, the modern capital town of Bhutan (about one hour to two hours along a very scenic route).

Schools based in India may choose to travel overland to Bhutan and cross the border in Phuentsholing. Overland travel time from the border to Thimphu is approximately 4 hours.

On arrival, check in at your hotel and freshen up. Students will be distributed in twin rooms (2 students per room).

Lunch : local restaurant in Thimphu town or in the hotel, depending on the group's convenience.

In the afternoon, we walk a short distance to visit the **Memorial Chorten**. The building of this landmark was originally envisaged by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who had wanted to erect 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 peace.

Following this visit the students have two options :

Option 1 : Drive to Motithang to visit the **Takin Preserve**, located in the Motithang district of Thimphu, Bhutan is a wildlife reserve area for takin, the national animal of Bhutan. Originally a mini-zoo, it was converted into a preserve when it was discovered that the animals refrained from inhabiting the surrounding forest even when set free. The reason for declaring the takin as the national animal of Bhutan on 25 November 2005 (*Budorcas taxicolor*) is attributed to a legend of the animal's creation in Bhutan in the 15th century by Lama Drukpa Kunley. Your guide will give you a briefing on the great Lama Drukpa Kunley, he's an interesting figure! **SERVICE (CONSERVATION) / ENVIRONMENT**

Option 2 : **Clean up campaign**. Students and the local community can get together to clean the premises of the Coronation Park. The Coronation Park is a small park located by the riverside and located opposite the archery and football stadiums. **SERVICE / ENVIRONMENT**

End the day by visiting Thimphu's **weekend farmer's market**.

Dinner at a local restaurant or the hotel (depending on the group's convenience)

Overnight Hotel Phuntsho Pelri in Thimphu.

(If the group is too tired to visit the market this evening, it can be rescheduled for one of the next days).



Day 2 : Thimphu

After an early breakfast, take a short drive up the Thimphu Valley to Jigme Dorji National Park, one of Bhutan's revered wildlife sanctuaries. From here you cross the Thimphu Chu (River) over a covered wooden swing bridge, adorned with hundreds of prayer flags. You then begin the ascent on foot **ACTION** to **Cheri Goemba**, a small monastery perched on the hill with a view over the Thimphu Valley. This monastery was built in 1620 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the man responsible for many of Bhutan's most historic *dzongs* (fortress) and monasteries. It is here that he established the first Bhutanese body of Buddhist monks, and scattered across the hillside are many small meditation huts where the devout monks and their students can seclude themselves for extended periods of meditation. Visit the tiny temples and shrines within the complex. On the drive to the bridge, the mighty Himalayas can be seen in the distance.

Hike to Cheri Goemba : approximately 1 hr 15 min – 2 hours round trip

The group returns to Thimphu.

The afternoon is dedicated to **CREATIVITY**. You will learn about the arts and crafts of Bhutan. Bhutan is proud of its artistic heritage and produces works of excellent quality and great artistic value.

The arts and crafts are grouped in one list under the name "Thirteen Arts", the *Zorig Chusum* : *Zo* means "to make", *rig* "science" and *chusum* "thirteen".

They consist of the following : painting, sculpture, carving, calligraphy, papermaking, casting, embroidery, weaving, carpentry, masonry, bamboo and cane weaving, gold/silver smithy, black smithy.

Today, you will get the opportunity to learn about some of the above components.

1. You will start with a visit to the **Institute for Zorig Chusum** (commonly known as the Painting School), where a six-year training course is given in the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Here you will get to observe students undergoing their training course and view their works. **CREATIVITY**
2. After lunch, you will visit the **Traditional Handmade Paper Factory**. Witness the process from start to finish. The paper is made from the barks of the black Daphne tree. The thicker paper is used for scriptures and the thinner ones are used for wrapping gifts and various other purposes. Did you know that in Bhutan, even the shopping bags are made of paper? Not a single plastic shopping bag in sight in the whole country ! **CREATIVITY / SUSTAINABILITY**
3. Time permitting you will also visit a **local Goldsmith** to observe his/her work.

Next, you will proceed to visit the **Changjiji READ Library**, a lending library that serves the people. READ Global is one of the few international non-profit organizations operating in Bhutan. To learn more about READ Global please click here :

https://www.readglobal.org/press_release/read-bhutan-launched/

The field coordinator for READ Bhutan will give you a brief presentation on READ Bhutan's programs in Bhutan. Following the presentation, you will have an interactive session with the center's users. The center will invite 10 -15 women and children from the community to interact with you. Light refreshment and snacks will be organized.

Chaperones – we strongly encourage the students and staff to donate old books to the center. Perhaps every student/teacher can donate one book ? A great way to have a positive impact on the local community ! SERVICE

At all of these places of interest, the students will get a much better understanding of the processes involved and of the importance of each one of the thirteen arts. Where possible, the group will also be able to interact with representatives of each craft site.

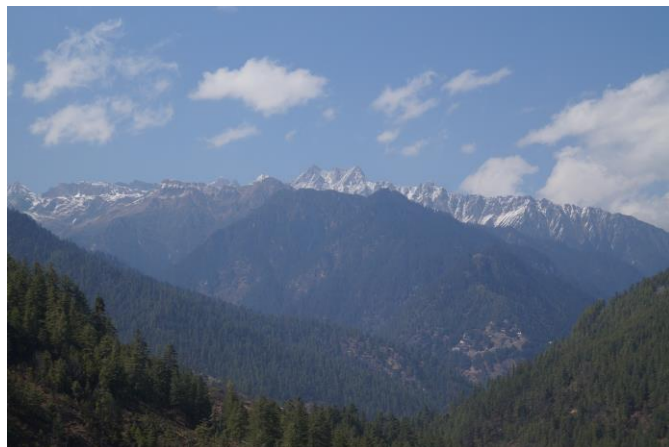
Transfer to your hotel.

You will sit in for a one-hour interactive session on **Gross National Happiness** by a Gross National Happiness expert. This expert who is an experienced speaker has given a speech on Gross National Happiness at a TED talk. There may even be a small quiz at the end of the talk, with authentic prizes for all ! *(There is an extra cost for this talk).*

SUSTAINABILITY / ENVIRONMENT

Dinner at a local momo restaurant.

Overnight Hotel Phuntsho Pelri in Thimphu



Day 3 : Thimphu

After breakfast, you will visit a private school in Thimphu to attend the morning assembly.

You will then take a short drive to visit the **Statue of Sakyamuni Buddha** (51.5 metre bronze statue), sitting on top of Kuensel Phodrang hill. This site offers unobstructed views over the beautiful Thimphu Valley.

Fun Fact: Did you know that Bhutan has set a world record of planting the highest number of trees in one hour? On 2 June 2015, a team of 100 Bhutanese men gathered at the Kunesel Phodrang hill and planted around 50,000 trees in one hour. The government of Bhutan lays great emphasis on protecting the environment. Bhutan has more than 75 percent forest coverage. **ENVIRONMENT / SUSTAINABILITY**

Today, you will participate in Bhutan's efforts of preserving the natural forest by planting a tree at this very spot. Each student/chaperone will be presented with a tree sapling and tools to trees. **SERVICE / ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS**

Lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch you visit the **Draktsho Vocational Training Centre for Special Children and Youth**. This centre was registered as a Public Benefit Organization under the Civil Society Organization. It is a non profit making organization and the only one of its kind in Bhutan, which aspires to enhance the living standard of children and youth with various types of disabilities through empowerment by training, and eventual integration within the main stream population. The center's main focus is to equip the trainees with vocational skills to enhance their opportunities for gainful employment. It also aims to build their self-esteem and self-reliance, thereby making them more independent, confident and contributing members of the society. The visit to this school will be special. You will be given the opportunity to interact with the students and learn about their livelihoods. **SERVICE**

In the later afternoon, you will visit Thimphu's fortress, Tashichho Dzong. This fortress has been the seat of the government since 1952 and presently houses the throne room and offices of the king, the secretariat and the ministries of home affairs and finance. Other government departments are housed in buildings nearby. This fortress is an impressively large structure surrounded by well-kept lawns and beautiful gardens. This is the same fortress that the Duke & Duchess visited to meet the King & Queen of Bhutan.

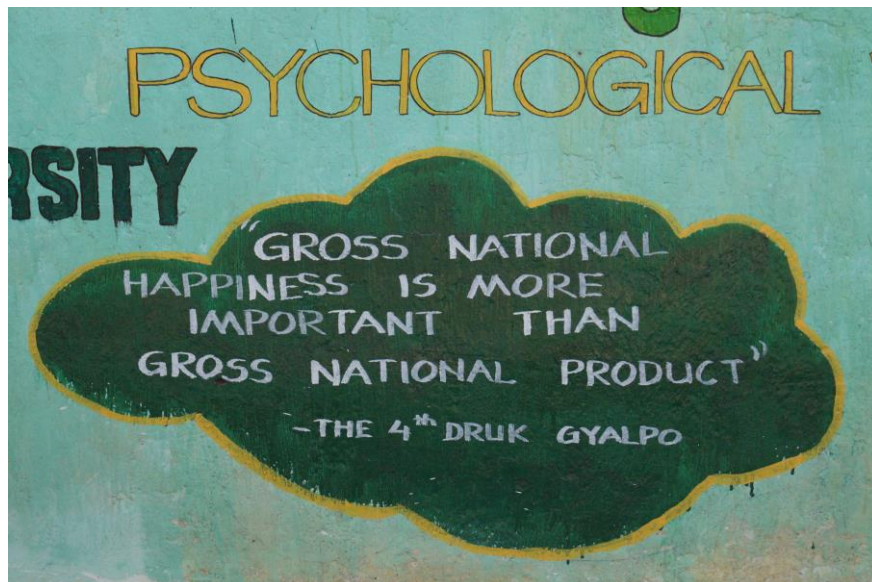
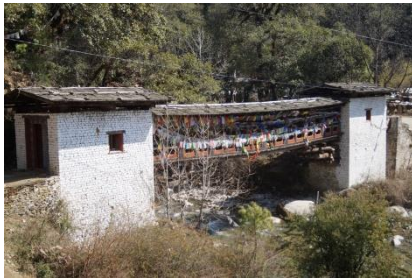
The dzong is located close to Thimphu town, on the bank of the Wangchhu River. It is an impressively large structure, surrounded by well-kept lawns and beautiful gardens. At the end of the afternoon you will witness the flag-lowering ceremony when the

neighborhood comes to a temporary stand-still.

We end the day with dinner and a private performance by a local band called **The Baby Boomers**. The Baby Boomers are the first rock bands in Bhutan to perform original songs in English. (After the performance, question/answer session) Check out their cover of the Beatles' classic "Cant Buy Me Love" :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chppFj43tUA> **CREATIVITY**

Overnight Hotel Phuntsho Pelri in Thimphu



Day 4 : Paro

In the morning, you head towards Paro Valley, which is a 1.5-hour drive away. You will make your way back up the dramatic Wang Chhu and Paro Chhu river valleys, before crossing thru Paro Town towards the north end of the valley.

This beautiful valley encapsulates a rich culture, scenic beauty and hundreds of myths and legends. It is home to many of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries, the country's only international airport, and the National Museum. Mt. Jhomolhari (7,300m) reigns in white glory at the northern end of the valley, its glacial waters plunging through deep gorges to form the Pa Chu (Paro River). The Paro valley is one of the kingdom's most fertile, producing the bulk of Bhutan's famous red rice from its terraced fields.

Visit the following sites in Paro :

Rinpung Dzong : Built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the "fortress of the heap of jewels" stands on a hill above Paro Township. The approach to the Dzong is through a traditional covered bridge (called the Nemi Zam) and then up a paved stone path running alongside the imposing outer walls. The valley's annual springtime religious festival, the Paro Tsechu, takes place in the courtyard of the Dzong and on the dance ground on the hillside above.

Drukgyel Dzong : This Dzong, with a picturesque village nestling below its ramparts, was built by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646, to commemorate his victory over the Tibetan invaders. Though largely destroyed by fire in 1951, the towering outer walls and central keep remain an imposing sight. On a clear day, there is a splendid view of Mt. Jhomolhari from the approach road to Drukgyel Dzong.

Lunch at a local restaurant

In the afternoon, there is an opportunity for a quick stroll to the nearby ruins, a visit to some of the valley's oldest and holiest religious monuments or a ramble down Paro's main street. If you would like to bring home some Bhutanese gifts, you can stroll the main street of Paro for some interesting Himalayan **artefacts or textiles**. **CREATIVITY**

In the evening, transfer back to Paro.

Dinner at the hotel or at a local restaurant

Overnight Tenzinling Resort in Paro

Day 5 : Paro - Tiger's Nest Hike

After breakfast you will drive to the start of the hiking trail that leads to the **Tiger's Nest" monastery**. This most famous of Bhutan's monasteries is spectacularly located on the side of a cliff 900 metres above the valley floor. It is said that in the 8th century Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a tigress from eastern Bhutan to this place and meditated in a cave here for 3 months, hence its name, "Tiger's Nest". There have been shrines at this sacred place for many centuries. The principal Lhakhang of the present monastic complex dates from 1692. The main structure was severely damaged by fire in 1998, but after many years of painstaking restoration work, the complex has now been fully restored to its former glory. Taktsang is a place of pilgrimage which Bhutanese try to visit at least once in a lifetime.

This hike **ACTION / ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS** takes around 4 to 6 hours (up and down including the visit to the monastery). For participants who are not able to do the whole hike on foot, there is the option to do the ascent on the back of a pony. There is a charge of US\$ 10 for this, to be paid on the spot to the owner of the pony. For the downhill part, the use of a pony should be avoided because of the steep sections on the trail. This is in fact a comfortable hike, best started early in the morning to avoid the midday temperatures. Halfway up/down the trail there is a rest house where drinks and snacks are available, and from where the Tiger's Nest monastery can be viewed, perched on the cliff face.

Packed lunch or lunch at the rest house along the trail

In the later afternoon, visit a local **Bhutanese Farm House** where you will observe the architecture of a traditional Bhutanese Farm House. You will observe a simple cooking demonstration of Bhutanese food by a local family (owner of the Farm house).

CREATIVITY

Dinner and a cultural show at the farm house.

Experience the colorful and lively dances and songs of Bhutan in a private cultural show. The one-hour performance gives you a quick insight into the various religious and secular songs and dances. These are the general categories of dance and songs performed:

- Mask Dance (enactment of religious drama/events & Buddhist teachings through dance)
- Boedra (Songs & Dance from the medieval period)
- Zhungdra (Folk Song & Dance)
- Zhey (Provincial Folk songs about the saint Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the unifier of Bhutan)
- Tashi Labey (Concluding song & dance)

Dinner at the hotel or at a local restaurant

Overnight Tenzinling Resort in Paro



Day 6: Exit Bhutan

Flight to Bangkok/other destinations and onward journey home.

Your Bhutan Tour ends here.

Please note that some of the sights/itinerary may change due to season, weather, national holidays, and special events. We maintain the right to alter the itinerary since tours are made in advance and unforeseen circumstances that mandate change may arise. Itinerary changes are made to improve your overall travel experience in Bhutan.

The driving and hiking times mentioned are approximate times and do not include breaks in the journey for sightseeing, photo/tea/meal/rest stops. There may be delays in transfer time due to road conditions, road repair/widening works, inclement weather and other unforeseen circumstances. During the treks/hikes, there may be delays or diversion of hiking trails due to trail conditions, inclement weather and other unforeseen circumstances. At all times, the local guides will communicate with the teachers in charge.

