Typical Bhutan Itineraries: 5-Day to 14-Day Trip Plans

Planning

18 min read

> Planning your Bhutan itinerary can feel overwhelming given so much to see and limited time. These carefully crafted sample itineraries cover different trip lengths and interests, from classic first-time visits to specialized festival, trekking, and family tours. Use these as templates to discuss with your tour operator and customize based on your specific interests.

How Many Days Are Enough to See Bhutan?

Five days is the practical minimum, and seven days is the sweet spot for most first-time visitors. Five days covers the western highlights - Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, and the Tiger's Nest hike - at a brisk but workable pace. Seven days adds breathing room and a quieter valley like Haa; ten or more days take you beyond the west into central Bhutan.

5 daysThe essential west: Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, and the Tiger's Nest - enough for a first taste7 daysThe most popular length - the same circuit at a relaxed pace, plus Haa Valley or a festival day10 daysAdds central Bhutan - Trongsa and the spiritual valleys of Bumthang14 daysThe full west-to-east crossing, all the way to Trashigang - for serious enthusiasts

The day-by-day plans below give you a ready template for each trip length.

Classic 5-Day: Highlights of Western Bhutan

The perfect introduction for first-time visitors with limited time. Covers the essential highlights of Paro, Thimphu, and Punakha - the three most iconic destinations in western Bhutan.

Day 1Arrive Paro → Drive to Thimphu (1 hour). Evening explore Memorial Chorten, main streetDay 2Thimphu morning - Tashichho Dzong, Buddha Dordenma, Folk Heritage Museum → Punakha via Dochula Pass (108 stupas)Day 3Punakha - Punakha Dzong, Chimi Lhakhang fertility temple → return to ParoDay 4Early Tiger's Nest hike (5-6 hours round trip). Afternoon Paro Dzong, Kyichu Lhakhang. Farewell dinnerDay 5Departure from Paro

Best for: First-timers, short vacation, essential Bhutan experience

Good to know

- Note: Can extend to 6 days for more relaxed pace

Classic 7-Day: Western Bhutan In-Depth

The most popular itinerary length, allowing deeper exploration of western Bhutan with more relaxed pacing and additional experiences like Haa Valley or longer time in each destination.

Day 1Arrive Paro. Paro Dzong, National Museum. AcclimatizeDay 2Paro → Haa Valley via Chelela Pass (highest motorable pass, 3,988m)Day 3Haa → Thimphu. Afternoon city tour: Buddha Dordenma, Memorial ChortenDay

4Thimphu morning - Tashichho Dzong, Folk Heritage Museum → Punakha via Dochula PassDay 5Punakha - Punakha Dzong, suspension bridge, Chimi Lhakhang → return to ParoDay 6Early Tiger's Nest hike. Afternoon Kyichu Lhakhang, farewell dinnerDay 7Departure from Paro

Best for: First-timers wanting comprehensive experience

Good to know

- Variations: Swap Haa for extra day in Punakha or add farmhouse stay

10-Day: Western & Central Bhutan

Extends beyond western Bhutan to include the spiritual heartland of Bumthang, crossing dramatic mountain passes and experiencing traditional villages and ancient temples.

Days 1-3Paro, Thimphu (as in 7-day itinerary)Day 4Thimphu → Punakha via Dochula. Punakha DzongDay 5Punakha → Trongsa (long scenic drive, 6-7 hrs). Visit Trongsa DzongDay 6Trongsa → Bumthang via Yotongla Pass. Visit Jakar townDay 7Bumthang valley tour: Jambay Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang, Burning Lake - or Tang Valley explorationDay 8Bumthang → Paro (long drive or domestic flight if available)Day 9Tiger's Nest hike. Farewell dinnerDay 10Departure from Paro

Best for: Those wanting to go beyond the classics

Good to know

- Note: Domestic flights (when available) reduce drive time significantly

14-Day: Grand Tour West to East

The comprehensive Bhutan experience, traveling from Paro to Trashigang in the far east. This journey showcases Bhutan's diversity from developed west to traditional east.

Days 1-3Paro, Thimphu - major sights, acclimatization, and the Tiger's Nest hikeDays 4-5Punakha and Wangdue - dzongs, temples, rafting optionDays 6-7Trongsa, Bumthang - central valleys and spiritual sitesDay 8Bumthang → Mongar via Thrumshingla Pass (beautiful drive)Day 9Mongar → Trashigang. Visit Trashigang DzongDay 10Trashigang area - weaving villages, local marketsDay 11Return journey begins - Trashigang → Bumthang or MongarDay 12Continue west - Bumthang/Trongsa regionDay 13Return to Paro (flight if available, otherwise drive via Punakha). Farewell dinnerDay 14Departure from Paro

Best for: Serious Bhutan enthusiasts, repeat visitors

Good to know

- Note: Eastern roads can be rough - patience required

Festival Special: Paro Tshechu (7 Days)

Timed around the famous Paro Tshechu (typically March/April), this itinerary ensures you experience the colorful mask dances while still seeing major sights.

Day 1Arrive Paro. Check festival schedule. Evening restDay 2Full day at Paro Tshechu - arrive early for best

viewing positionsDay 3Second day of Tshechu (often includes thongdrol unveiling at dawn)Day 4Paro → Punakha via Thimphu. Punakha Dzong visitDay 5Punakha morning → Thimphu sightseeing → evening return to ParoDay 6Early Tiger's Nest hike. Afternoon Kyichu Lhakhang, farewell dinnerDay 7Departure from Paro

Best for: Cultural immersion, photography enthusiasts

What if I want to see a festival?

Build your itinerary around festival dates. Major festivals (Paro, Thimphu Tshechus) attract crowds - book 4-6 months ahead. Your operator can suggest itineraries incorporating festivals with other highlights.

Good to know

- Important: Book 4-6 months ahead - festival times are peak season
- Variations: Thimphu Tshechu (September) or Punakha Drubchen (February/March)

Trekking: Druk Path + Culture (8 Days)

Combines the classic Druk Path Trek (5-6 days) from Paro to Thimphu with cultural sightseeing. Experience alpine lakes, rhododendron forests, and stunning mountain views.

Day 1Arrive Paro. Paro Dzong, National Museum. Trek briefingDay 2Trek Day 1: Paro to Jele Dzong (3,450m). Through forest to meadowsDay 3Trek Day 2: Jele Dzong to Jangchulakha (3,780m). Views of ChomolhariDay 4Trek Day 3: Jangchulakha to Jimiling (3,880m). High ridgeline walkingDay 5Trek Day 4: Jimiling to Simkotra (4,110m). Pass mountain lakesDay 6Trek Day 5: Simkotra to Phajoding to Thimphu. Descend to capitalDay 7Thimphu sightseeing - Buddha Dordenma, Tashichho Dzong, markets → evening drive to ParoDay 8Departure from Paro (add a day if you also want the Tiger's Nest hike)

Best for: Active travelers, trekking enthusiasts

Can I combine trekking with sightseeing?

Yes! Popular combinations include 3-4 days of sightseeing plus the Druk Path Trek (6 days) or shorter treks like Bumthang Owl Trek (3 days). Allow 10-14 days for comprehensive sightseeing-trekking itineraries.

Good to know

- Fitness: Moderate fitness required, some altitude experience helpful
- Best season: March-May, September-November

Family-Friendly (7 Days)

Designed for families with children (see our guide to Bhutan with kids), this itinerary features shorter drives, kid-friendly activities, and flexibility for varying energy levels.

Day 1Arrive Paro. Short walk around town. Early dinner and restDay 2Paro → Thimphu. Takin Preserve (kids love takins!), Buddha DordenmaDay 3Thimphu - Folk Heritage Museum (interactive), paper-making workshop, evening marketDay 4Thimphu → Punakha (shorter drive via Dochula). Suspension bridge walkDay 5Punakha morning → Return to Paro. Farmhouse visit optionDay 6Tiger's Nest - kids 8+ can do the hike; younger ones to the cafeteria viewpoint. Afternoon archery demonstration, riverside picnicDay 7Departure from Paro

Best for: Families with children 6+

Good to know

- Tips: Request child-friendly meals, bring snacks, allow flexibility
- Kids under 6: SDF exempt; 6-11: 50% SDF discount

Photography Tour (10 Days)

Optimized for landscape and cultural photography, this itinerary prioritizes golden hour timing, iconic viewpoints, and festival/local life opportunities.

Day 1Arrive Paro. Golden hour at Paro Valley viewpointDay 2Pre-dawn start for Tiger's Nest at sunrise (fewer crowds, best light)Day 3Paro → Haa via Chelela Pass. Sunset shoot at pass (weather permitting)Day 4Haa village life morning → Thimphu afternoon/evening shootsDay 5Thimphu - pre-dawn Memorial Chorten (prayer rituals), Buddha at sunsetDay 6Dochula Pass sunrise → Punakha. Golden hour at Punakha DzongDay 7Punakha morning shoot → Phobjikha Valley. Crane photography (winter)Day 8Phobjikha dawn shoot - Gangtey Monastery and valley mist → return to Punakha. Evening riverside lightDay 9Return to Paro via scenic route. Buffer for reshoots or weather makeupDay 10Departure from Paro

Best for: Serious photographers, social media creators

Good to know

- Tip: Hire photography-specialized guide. Bring multiple memory cards

Itinerary Customization Tips

Every itinerary can be tailored to your interests, pace, and budget. Here's how to work with your tour operator to create your perfect trip. Can I customize sample itineraries?
Absolutely! These are templates. Your tour operator can modify based on interests, fitness level, festival dates, and special requests. Popular customizations include adding Haa Valley, extending in Bumthang, or adding treks.

Good to know

- Share your interests: culture, nature, adventure, photography, wellness
- Be realistic about driving: Mountain roads are slow (30-40 km/hr average)
- Budget buffer days: Weather and road conditions can cause delays
- Festival timing: Check dates and book early if planning around festivals
- Trekking add-ons: Even day hikes can be added to cultural tours
- Special experiences: Hot stone bath, cooking class, archery, farm stay
- Luxury vs. budget: Specify accommodation preferences upfront
- Physical ability: Be honest about fitness levels for appropriate activities
- Combine countries: Popular to pair with Nepal or India

- When to go: Bhutan is a year-round destination - spring and autumn are best for most activities, winter offers clear skies and the black-necked cranes, and the green monsoon months mean fewer visitors

Frequently Asked Questions

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How much driving is involved?

Bhutan's mountain roads limit daily distances. Expect 2-4 hours of scenic (but winding) driving between destinations. Longer journeys to Bumthang or eastern Bhutan take 6-8 hours with stops.

Can I combine trekking with sightseeing?

Yes! Popular combinations include 3-4 days of sightseeing plus the Druk Path Trek (6 days) or shorter treks like Bumthang Owl Trek (3 days). Allow 10-14 days for comprehensive sightseeing-trekking itineraries.

What if I want to see a festival?

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Need More Information?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts for personalized advice.

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