



Earthbound Expeditions

Nepal and Bhutan Tour

12 days, from US\$3,287 per person

Duration

12 days

Grade

Easy

Max altitude

3,120 m

Start and end

Kathmandu

On foot

Sightseeing

Best season

Mar to May, Sep to Nov

Accommodation

Three-star hotels

Meals

Mostly full board

Group size

Up to 12

Getting there

Drukair flights

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Nepal and Bhutan Tour Overview

Two Himalayan kingdoms in one trip: the living temple cities of the Kathmandu valley, the dzongs and monasteries of Bhutan, the Tiger's Nest, and rhino in the lowland jungle at Chitwan.

Tour overview

This trip visits two neighbouring Himalayan kingdoms that are very different from each other. Nepal is busy and crowded, both Hindu and Buddhist, and has been open to travellers since 1951. Bhutan is quiet, orderly and entirely Buddhist, admits visitors on a fixed daily fee, and has never been colonised or occupied. Twelve days is enough to understand why people who have visited both describe them so differently.

Why Bhutan is in the middle of the trip

The reason is the flights. Only two airlines fly into Paro, Drukair and Bhutan Airlines, and for most travellers the practical departure points are Kathmandu, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangkok and Singapore. Kathmandu is the only one of these in the Himalaya. The Bhutan section therefore fits in the middle of a Nepal itinerary, and it is not an expensive detour: the flight from Kathmandu to Paro takes an hour.

Who this trip is for

Travellers who want to see the Himalaya without trekking for two weeks. The only demanding day is the walk to the Tiger's Nest on day 7, which involves 900 m of ascent and descent at around 3,000 m and takes four to five hours. The rest of the trip is sightseeing, driving and a jeep safari in a national park. It suits travellers in their seventies and families with children, and we recommend it to travellers who cannot trek but want to see the mountains.

Cost of the Bhutan section

The Bhutan section accounts for much of the price of this trip. Bhutan charges a Sustainable Development Fee of USD 100 per person per night, plus a USD 40 visa fee, before any hotel, meal or guide costs. Four nights amount to USD 440 per person in government charges. This is not a mark-up by us but national policy, and it keeps the valleys quiet.

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	–	–	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu valley sites, up to Nagarkot	–	–	2,175 m
3	Nagarkot sunrise, Bhaktapur, back to Kathmandu	–	–	1,400 m
4	Fly Kathmandu to Paro, on to Thimphu	1 hr flying	–	2,320 m
5	Over the Dochula to Punakha	3 hrs	–	3,100 m
6	Punakha to Paro via Wangdue	4–5 hrs	–	2,235 m
7	The Tiger's Nest	4–5 hrs	6–7 km	3,120 m
8	Fly Paro to Kathmandu	1 hr flying	–	1,400 m
9	Drive to Chitwan	5 hrs	–	150 m

10	Chitwan, canoe, jungle walk and jeep safari	-	-	150 m
11	Fly or drive back to Kathmandu	25 min flying	-	1,400 m
12	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. In the evening we brief you on the trip and on the Bhutan documents: your visa clearance letter has already been issued, and your Paro flight seats are reserved against it.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Kathmandu Valley sightseeing and drive to Nagarkot

You visit Swayambhunath on its hill, the cremation ghats at Pashupatinath, the great dome of Boudhanath and the carved courtyards of Patan, with a guide who can explain the religious art in detail. In the afternoon, we drive up to Nagarkot on the valley rim for the sunset.

Altitude: 2,175 m On foot: Easy walking, 3–4 hrs Night: Hotel, Nagarkot Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Sunrise at Nagarkot and Bhaktapur

An early start to see the Himalaya along the northern horizon, including Everest on a clear morning. You then drive down to Bhaktapur, the best-preserved of the valley's three old cities, where we spend the afternoon before returning to Kathmandu.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Fly to Paro and drive to Thimphu

The one-hour flight offers some of the best mountain views of any commercial flight. Sit on the left to see the Himalaya, including Everest and Kanchenjunga. Pilots fly the approach into Paro manually between mountains. In the afternoon, you visit Thimphu: the Memorial Chorten, the 54 m Buddha Dordenma above the valley, and Tashichho Dzong.

Altitude: 2,320 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Thimphu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Drive over the Dochula pass to Punakha

A three-hour drive east over the Dochula pass at 3,100 m, where 108 chortens stand on a rise and, on a clear morning, the eastern Himalaya is visible across the skyline. We descend into the warm Punakha valley to visit Chimi Lhakhang and then Punakha Dzong, at the meeting point of two rivers, which is considered the most beautiful building in Bhutan.

Altitude: 1,200 m On foot: Easy walking, 1–2 hrs Night: Hotel, Punakha Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Punakha to Paro via Wangdue

We drive back over the pass and west through Wangdue to the Paro valley, stopping along the way at places such as a roadside chorten, a village archery match or a farmhouse. Driving in Bhutan is slow, and the journey is an important part of the experience.

Altitude: 2,235 m On foot: None, 4–5 hr drive Night: Hotel, Paro Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Hike to the Tiger's Nest

The main walk of the trip: three to four hours up through oak and pine forest to Taktsang, which sits on a cliff 900 m above the valley floor. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown here on the back of a tigress. This is the most physically demanding day of the trip. Ponies are available for the lower half.

Altitude: 3,120 m at Taktsang On foot: 6–7 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Hotel, Paro Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Fly back to Kathmandu

The morning flight west, with the mountains on the right-hand side this time. The afternoon is free in Kathmandu for Thamel and anything you did not see on day 2. In the evening there is a Nepali cultural show and dinner.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 9

Drive to Chitwan

A five-hour drive south, out of the hills and onto the Terai plain, which is hot, flat and green, and much closer to India in character. Chitwan is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the last strongholds of the one-horned rhino. In the evening there is a walk by the Rapti river and a Tharu stick dance after dinner.

Altitude: 150 m On foot: None, 5 hr drive Night: Lodge, Chitwan Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Full day in Chitwan National Park

A dugout canoe trip on the river at first light to look for gharial and kingfishers, a guided jungle walk, and a jeep safari into the park to look for rhino, and with luck a sloth bear or a tiger. In between, you visit a Tharu village and the elephant breeding centre.

Altitude: 150 m On foot: Jungle walk, 2–3 hrs Night: Lodge, Chitwan Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Return to Kathmandu

A twenty-five-minute flight from Bharatpur, or a five-hour drive if you would prefer to see the countryside. The rest of the day is free for shopping in Patan and Thamel, and there is a farewell dinner in the evening.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 12

Departure

We take you to the airport. If you are continuing on a trek, we introduce you to the trekking team here.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers and ground transport
- Licensed English-speaking guide
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All permits and national park fees
- Meals as per the itinerary

Not included

- International flights
- Travel and rescue insurance
- Personal trekking gear
- Tips and personal expenses
- Nepal entry visa (on arrival)

Packing list

Tiger's Nest walk

- Walking shoes or light boots with good grip. The path is stone and dust, with 900 m of steps
- Trekking poles if you find them helpful on descents. Sticks can be borrowed at the start of the path
- A small daypack, two litres of water and some food
- A warm layer for the top, which is 900 m above the valley and much colder

Temples and dzongs

- Long trousers and tops with sleeves. Shorts and vests are not permitted in a dzong and you will be refused entry
- Slip-on shoes. You remove them at every temple, around a dozen times
- A hat that is easy to remove, as hats are not worn indoors
- Smart casual clothes for the evenings, if you wish. Bhutanese hotels are relaxed, but the country is fairly formal

Clothing for a range of temperatures

- Layers. This trip goes from 150 m at Chitwan to 3,120 m at Taktsang within four days
- A light down or fleece jacket for Nagarkot, the Dochula pass and evenings in Bhutan
- A light waterproof jacket, needed more in spring and autumn than in the dry season
- Sunglasses and SPF 50 sun cream. The sun at 3,000 m is stronger than the temperature suggests
- Insect repellent and long sleeves for the evenings in Chitwan

Documents and money

- Passport valid for six months with two blank pages, plus photocopies
- Four passport photographs, for the Bhutan and Nepal visas
- A printed copy of your Bhutan visa clearance letter
- Travel insurance certificate showing medical evacuation cover
- US dollars in cash, in clean notes, for the Nepal visa, and a card for other expenses
- A universal adaptor, as Nepal and Bhutan use different socket types

Optional extras

Festival departure

+\$200 on the price, included in the itinerary

The Paro Tsechu in March or April and the Thimphu Tshechu in September or October are the two largest festivals, and both involve several days of masked dances in a dzong courtyard. Dates follow the Bhutanese lunar calendar, and hotels are booked up a year in advance.

Bumthang

from \$890, +3 days

Travel east beyond Trongsa to the four valleys of Bumthang, the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, which contain the country's oldest temples. The journey is a long drive or a short domestic flight, and it gives a deeper experience of Bhutan than the areas near Paro.

Druk Path trek

from \$760, +4 days

A four-day trek from Paro to Thimphu over the ridge, passing high lakes at around 4,000 m, with nights in tents. It is the most accessible trek in Bhutan and a very different experience from the road tour.

Everest scenic flight

\$220, 1 morning

A one-hour flight along the range from Kathmandu with a guaranteed window seat. It can be added on day 3 or day 11, and it is the closest view of Everest on this trip.

Pokhara and the Annapurnas

from \$490, +3 days

Travel west to the lake at Pokhara, with views of the Annapurnas across the water, and an optional short walk to a viewpoint. It is easily added after Chitwan.

Single rooms throughout

\$540

A room to yourself for all eleven nights. Unlike on our treks, this is available at every stop on this trip.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: enepaltrekking.com/nepal-and-bhutan-tour