

Bhutan: Land of the Thunder Dragon

December 28 – January 3 (7 days)

Thimphu

Punakha

Paro

Hosted by: Zhu Bhutan, Institute of Happiness

I. Bhutan trek overview



If you are short on time, this is the page with all key info; if not – read on!

Dates

From December 28, 2025, to January 3, 2026

Locations

- Thimphu
- Punakha
- Paro (+Taksang)

Price

- Based on volume, namely:
- 30+ participants → **\$1,500**
- 15+ participants → **\$1,800**
- <15 participants → **TBD**

Capacity

- **40 students, including partners**

Unique trek features

- **The mindful development symposium alongside Bhutanese participants.** This is an opportunity to hear a very different approach to Western-led development model; it will inform many of your discussions in BGIE.
- **Meeting Buddhist monks** at the top of the Tiger's Nest monastery in the Himalayas. And maybe getting your fortune told.
- **Spending NYE with the locals**, in a location and setting that you would have never thought of.

Style (disclaimer: subjective review!)

The Bhutan trek delivers **an exceptionally immersive encounter with local life** (more so than any other HBS trek). To safeguard its unique Himalayan culture, the Kingdom strictly limits tourism: you'll find no chain stores or international restaurant brands — everything is home-grown and authentically Bhutanese. **Travelers who rely on familiar comforts abroad may feel slightly out of place here. But if you're eager to push your boundaries, explore with child-like curiosity, and weave yourself into the local fabric, this journey promises a once-in-a-lifetime experience.**

Thoughtful exploration is the focus of the trek

Join our trek if:



You look for a blend of adventure, cultural immersion, and insightful learning, just like:

- Contemplating and discussing the tradeoffs of the “growth at all costs” development model
- Seeing the rich history and culture of a Kingdom that has never been colonized by any major power
- Making local friends; engaging in hiking, archery, or meditation with fellow HBS students



You want to be more aware and mindful of what you need to do for a fulfilling life



You are curious about the world around you and are eager to push yourself to the boundaries of your comfort zone



You want to make lifelong friends with students outside your HBS section



Our org. team hosted 450 students from Harvard and MIT in Bhutan

Head organizers



Sonam

- **HKS'24**
- Royal Government of Bhutan



Kinga

- **Former member of the parliament of Bhutan**
- **Founder of Institute of Happiness**
- **Former CEO of Bank of Bhutan**



Tshering

- **Founder and CEO of Zhu Bhutan Travels**
- **Founder and CEO of Hotel Thimphu Towers**

Regular organizers



Alex

- **Experienced traveler** – been to 72 countries
- **Co-founder of Academic Odyssey**, a startup for immersive and educational travel
- **HBS MBA' 25**

This will be the 16th Harvard trek to Bhutan since 2017



Trek fee is based on volume and covers almost everything

Included:



Accommodation

(6 nights, 1 room split between 2 people – twin beds)



Most meals

Most meals are covered by the trek fee



Visits to historic sights and buildings

All entry tickets and guides where applicable



Meetings

Speaker and translator fee where applicable



Guided tours

To all sites listed in the trek agenda



Transfers

All transfers within the country, including to/from the airport



Taxes

Tourist city and state taxes where applicable

Not included (extras):



Insurance

Health and travel insurance



Flights

You are responsible for booking flights



On-demand mobile hot-spots

Mobile data



Tips

Tips are not required but are welcomed



Optional activities

Free time, nights out, etc.



Entry visa

Everyone needs a visa to enter Bhutan. We will apply and get this visa for you

II. Trek agenda

Tentative

Day 1 – Welcome to Thimphu

06:00

Arrivals to Paro International Airport

Drivers will collect you and bring you to the hotel

Drive to Thimphu

12:00

Free time

Rest and recover after the trip. Or walk around town

Bhutan trek introduction session

18:00

Guided tour of Thimphu

24:00

Dinner

Location: Hotel Thimphu Tower

Bhutan fashion

Get your Ghos and Kiras and get ready for the trek!



Thimphu, December 28



Text – activity is organized by the hosts; costs are included in the price of the trip

Text – activity is organized independently by visitors; costs are not included in the price of the trip (tips will be shared)

Day 2 – Understanding Bhutan, mindful development symposium day 1



Thimphu, December 29

06:00

Breakfast

Location: Hotel Thimphu Tower

Meeting with Hon. Prime Minister of Bhutan*

Location: Hotel Thimphu Tower

Pending availability

12:00

Mindful development symposium

Discuss “mindful development” economic model with local Bhutanese participants

18:00

Lunch

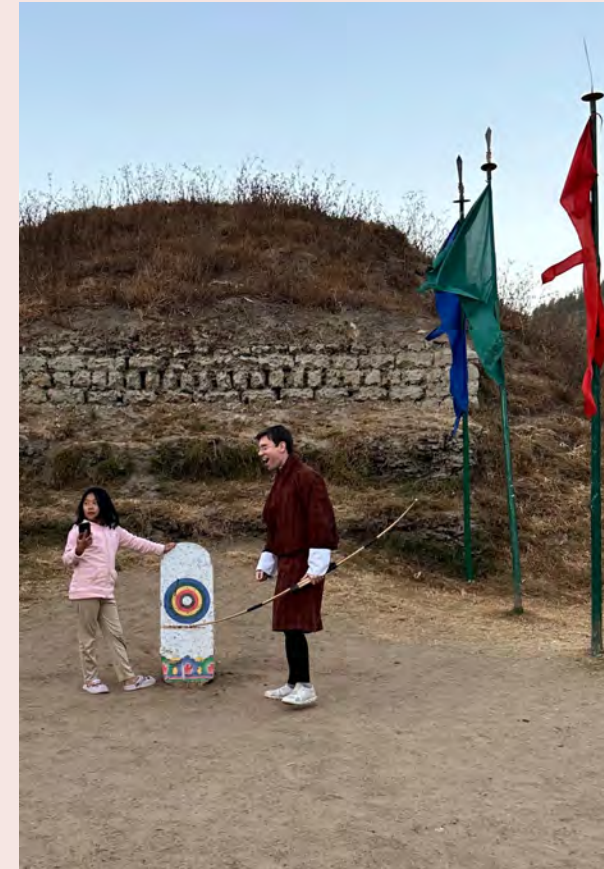
Location: Forum venue

Mindful development symposium continued

24:00

Dinner and drinks

Location: downtown Thimphu



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Day 3 – Mindful development symposium day 2

06:00

Breakfast

Location: Hotel Thimphu Tower

12:00

Mindful development symposium continued

Picking up where we left off

18:00

Lunch

Location: symposium venue

Free time

Mainly to mingle with Bhutanese participants

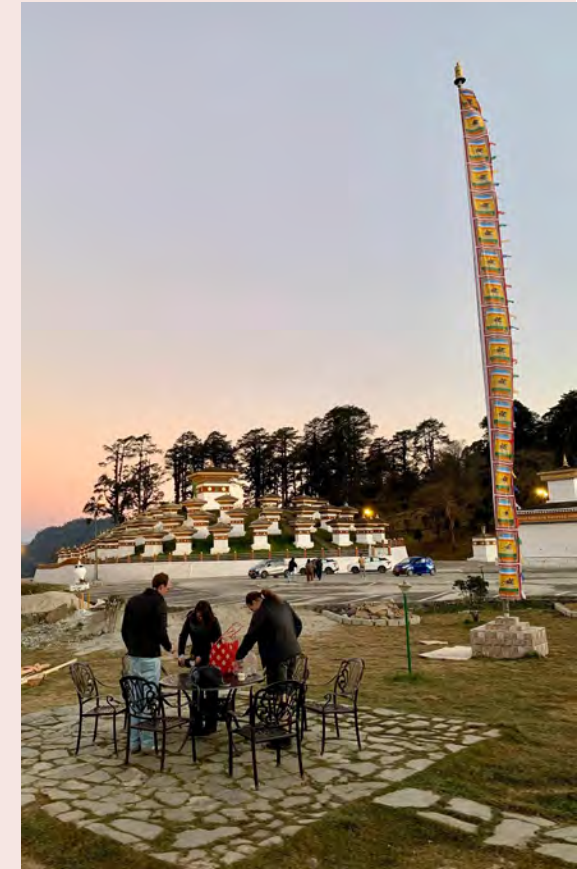
24:00

Dinner

Location: San Maru restaurant



Thimphu, December 30



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Day 4 – Deeper dive into Bhutan, exploring Punakha

06:00

Breakfast

Location: Hotel Thimphu Tower

Drive to Punakha

12:00

Visit Dochula Peak, Punakha Dzong, Temple of Divine Mad Monk

Lunch

Location: TBD in Punakha

18:00

Drive back to Thimphu

Free time

Rest and recover; get ready for NYE party

24:00

Family-style NYE party

Possibly cook together traditional meals, watch NYE fireworks on the streets of Thimphu with locals



Punakha, December 31




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Day 5 – R&R, drive to Paro

06:00	Breakfast (slow morning) Location: Hotel Thimphu Tower
12:00	Drive to Paro
	Lunch Location: TBD, downtown Paro
18:00	Visit Bhutan National Museum, Duntse Lhakhang and Drugyel Dzong
24:00	Dinner Location: TBD

 Paro, January 1



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Day 5 – Climb to the Taksang Gompa

06:00

Breakfast

Location: Paro Hotel

12:00

Hike up the Taksang (Tiger's Nest)

4-5 hour trek in the mountains

Lunch

Location: Any café along the Taksang Trek

18:00

Transfer back to Paro

Archery match

Hot stone bath

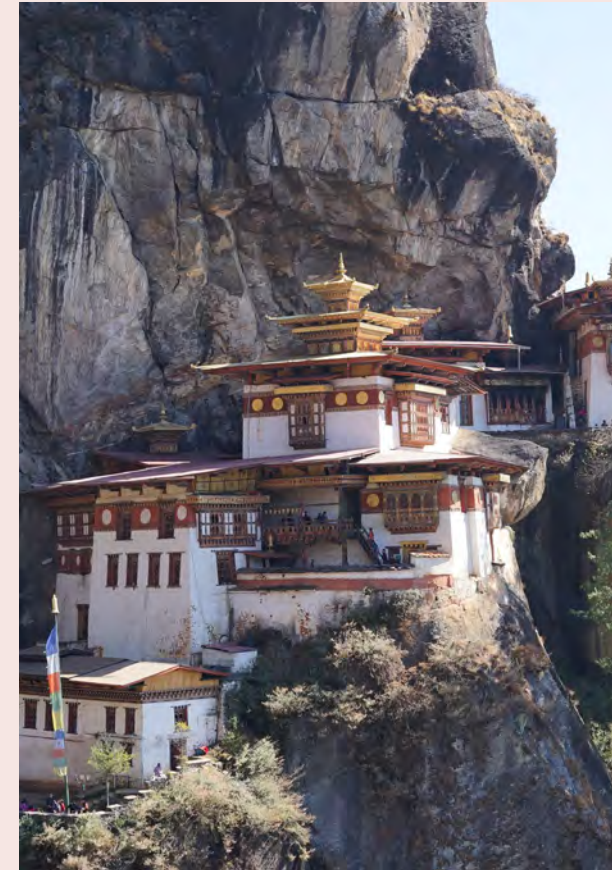
24:00

Dinner and wrap-up session

Location: TBD



Paro/Taksang, January 2



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Day 7 – Explore Paro, and farewell Bhutan trek

06:00

Breakfast

Location: Paro Hotel

12:00

Free time

For those departing later, we will take you on a walking tour around Paro and then go for lunch to the Zhiwaling Hotel

Departures

We will take you back to the airport

18:00

24:00



Paro, January 3



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III. Accommodation and logistics overview

Accommodation

Thimphu Tower Hotel, Thimphu



Family-owned hotel in central Thimphu



TBD Hotel, Paro



Cozy hotel in Paro with easy access to the airport



IV. Signup and misc.



Recommended packing list

While on the trek you have an option to wear a Bhutanese national attire (Gho for men and Kira for women). In addition, we recommend that you pack the following:

- Comfortable walking shoes
- Long knee length Gold Toe (or leggings) for men
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Hat/cap
- Warm thermal shirt and long johns
- Semi-formal attire
- Water Bottle



Miscellaneous items



Entry requirements

- You are required to have a valid visa to travel to Bhutan. We will issue a visa for you after trek registration. We will collect a visa fee in addition to the trek fee.
- If you travel to Bhutan via India, you are required to have a valid Indian transfer visa.



Health

- Bhutan is a country in the Himalayan mountains; if you are prone to getting altitude sickness, consider bringing relevant medication
- Consider bringing motion sickness tablets if you are prone to getting car sick as some transfers take a few hours on winding mountainous roads



V. FAQs



FAQs

Q1: Can partners join?

A1: Yes

Q2: Is Bhutan safe?

A2: Yes, Bhutan is one of the safest countries in the world.

Q3: What about for the LGBTQ+ community?

A3: Bhutan is safe for everyone.

Q4: Do I need to bring a lot of cash?

A4: No, most places in Bhutan accept international debit and credit cards.

Q5: Will my SIM card work in Bhutan?

A5: Most SIM cards work well using roaming. However, if you would like to get a local SIM card, we can arrange one for you.





Hope to see you soon

Academic
Odyssey

For any questions, please reach out:
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