

Abercrombie & Kent



Program Overview:

Duration: 8 days

Highlights: This seven-night package to Bhutan is the ultimate in comfortable adventure travel, experiencing Bhutan's Buddhist culture at a deep and comprehensive level. The exploration comprises four days of guided walks above and around the Paro Valley, visiting the Taktsang 'Tiger's Nest' Monastery, the National Museum, Drukgyel Dzong and the ancient temple of Kyichu Lhakhang. There's also a wild hike to Kila Nunnery on the ridge between the valleys of Haa and Paro and an acclimatization hike to Drakhapo monastery. At each site we will explore the subtle intricacies of this ancient Buddhist land, learning about its people, culture and deep-set religious traditions. To further experience Bhutan's culture and landscape, we spend a day in the capital, Thimphu. We also journey through wild and wooded hinterland by mountain bike with our own experienced Uma guide. Returning to our comfortable home in the mountains each day, there will be plenty of free time to relax and enjoy the peace. We can also access the facilities including swimming pool, steam room, daily yoga and a COMO Shambhala Massage for every guest.

ITINERARY:

Day 1

Arrival Uma Paro

Arrival, check-in, property show-round and local sightseeing. Uma Paro staff will welcome you at the airport for the 10-minute transfer to the property. After settling in our first foray into the Kingdom begins with sightseeing in Paro town and a visit to a local temple. This afternoon provides an opportunity to acclimatise to the rarefied air at this altitude and to get to know your guide, who will offer some additional sightseeing options for the rest of the day depending on your interests and energy levels.

Overnight : Uma Paro

DAY 2

Uma Paro

Walk to Zurig Dzong, Rinpung Dzong, Ta Dzong, Paro town, Kyichu Lhakhang and Drukgyel Dzong. We wind through pine forests high above Uma Paro to the pretty grounds of the

fortress-like monastery of Zurig Dzong. We traverse across to Ta Dzong, home to Bhutan's National Museum, with magnificent views over Paro, and on down to Rinpung Dzong (Fortress on a Heap of Jewels). The trail then leads across Paro Chhu (river) via the traditional covered bridge Nyamai Zam, and then past the main archery ground, Ugyen Pelri Palace and into Paro town. Driving a few kilometres north of Paro, we pay our respects at Kyichu Lhakhang; one of the oldest temples in Bhutan with its magical orange tree that bears fruit all year round. Time permitting, we drive further up the valley to Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1648 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to control the northern route to Tibet.

Duration: 5 – 7 hours (depending on time spent in National Museum and Paro)

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Guided with picnic or lunch at a local restaurant

Overnight : Uma Paro

DAY 3

Uma Paro

Drakhapo Monastery, Adventure Cave and Archery lesson. After a short drive from Uma Paro we start our 90-minute easy acclimatisation walk to Drakhapo Monastery, which has a small community of monks living nearby. The main temple room is precariously perched on the edge of a rock cliff and there are some sacred sites to view, including the body-imprint of Vajrayogini and a stone boot belonging to Guru Rinpoche. The monastery is built on a mountain dotted with underground caves. Nearby, one of these caves has a small ladder for the not-so-fainthearted, leading into a large cavern that soon turns into a very narrow crevasse. In the afternoon, we invite guests to try Bhutan's two most popular sports on Uma Paro's own archery ground (Bha Cho). Archery is the national sport of Bhutan, and every village has its own archery range. High-spirited competitions, usually accompanied by a banquet, are a part of all festive occasions. Using bamboo bows, teams of archers shoot at targets only 30 centimetres in diameter from a distance of 140 metres. Each team has a noisy crowd of supporters. Kuru is another very popular traditional Bhutanese game played in most villages.

Duration: 5 – 6 hours

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Guided with picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

DAY 4

Uma Paro

Day Out in Thimphu. The capital of Bhutan sprawls up the wooded western hillside of the Wang Chhu. The centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimphu is a bustling town where traditional ways mingle with modern life. The drive from Uma Paro to the capital takes about one hour and sights worth seeing include the following, time and local conditions permitting:

MARKET DAYS: It's easy to lose a couple of hours wandering through Thimphu's colourful stalls before heading into town for more shopping. Main market days are Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

BBS TOWER VIEWPOINT AND TAKIN COMPOUND: On the way to the viewpoint over Thimphu is the home of Bhutan's national animal, the Takin, a strange looking animal who some say looks like a beestung moose.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL CHORTEN: Bhutan's third king, H.M. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck died before his plan to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity came to fruition. However, the Royal Family and Cabinet resolved to fulfill his wishes and erect a memorial that would perpetuate his memory.

VIEW OF TRASHI CHHOE DZONG: 'Fortress of the Glorious Religion' was built in 1641 and then rebuilt by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck in the 1960s. Tashi Chhoe Dzong is home to government ministries, His Majesty's secretariat, and the central monk body. Entrance is granted to guests only after 5pm but the nine-hole golf course alongside makes a quirky photo opportunity.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE: This Bhutanese institution dispenses traditional medicines made from plants, minerals, animal parts, precious metals and gems. A working facility for research and the treatment of local people, the tour is fascinating.

NATIONAL TEXTILE MUSEUM: An insight into the national art of weaving, this museum shows fine examples of all the major weaving techniques and the changing styles of 'gho' and 'kira' over the years, with weavers demonstrating their skills on traditional back looms.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF 13 ARTS AND CRAFTS (ZORIG CHUSUM): Watch the rows of young students learning Bhutan's 13 traditional arts and crafts of carpentry, masonry, carving, painting, sculpture, casting, weaving, bamboo work, embroidery, woodturning, papermaking, blacksmithing and gold and silversmithing.

FOLK HERITAGE MUSEUM: This replica of a traditional Bhutanese house is exactly as it would have looked 100 years ago — and as many Bhutanese families still live to this day.

Please note museum, monastery, temple and dzong opening days and times can and do vary with national holidays and events such a visit by a member of the Royal Family or auspicious ceremonies.

The above denotes activities and places of interest available in Thimphu. There will not be time to visit all, however the day will be organized according to guests' particular interest.

Duration: 7 – 10 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Guided with picnic or sample typical Bhutanese fare in local restaurant

Overnight : Uma Paro

DAY 5

Uma Paro

Chele La Pass and hike to Kila Nunnery (optional bike descents). Start early for the drive to Chele La Pass which, at 3,988m is the highest road pass in Bhutan, snaking upwards through blue pine and rhododendron forests for 35 km. On a clear day the view sweeps away to the snow-dome of Bhutan's second highest peak, Mt Jhomolhari (7314m), and down to the Haa Valley, which only opened to foreigners in 2002 due to its proximity to the border with Sikkim and Tibet. This unspoilt valley harks back to a simpler, more traditional time. Striding out along the Edelweisscovered ridge, we pass a sky burial site. We then descend for the two-hour hike through dense rhododendron forest, possibly sighting shaggy yaks, to Kila Goemba, an ancient

nunnery nestled in a craggy patch on the mountainside below. Kila Goemba is a serene retreat for 32 Anim (Buddhist nuns) who lead an undisturbed life of religious studies, prayer and meditation. The nunnery is one of the seven oldest nunneries in the Kingdom. Dupthob Chhoeje Norbu and Dupthob Temba established it in the early ninth century as a place for meditation. After being destroyed by fire, the Lhakhang was reconstructed by the 25th Je Khenpo, Sherab Gyaltzen and in 1986, the Government officially established Kila Goemba as an Anim Dratshang (nunnery). This sacred place has a timeless quality which is ample reward after the effort of the hike. Having made our offerings and perhaps been blessed, it is time to descend further. An hour later and we are back at the road where we can saddle up on a mountain bike and freewheel down to Paro Valley. For those who prefer a leisurely sightseeing day there is the option to drive from Chele La Pass down the other side to the Haa Valley. In case Chele La Pass is not accessible during the winter months, your guide will propose an alternative for this day excursion.

Duration: 7 – 9 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

Guided with picnic, Kona Cinder mountain bike, helmet, gloves

Overnight : Uma Paro

DAY 6

Uma Paro

Sightseeing by Bike in the Paro Valley and on the Do Chhu Trail. Riding out from Uma Paro, we descend to Paro Town then turn north past Dungste Lhakhang, a chorten-like temple built in 1433 by Thangtong Gyalpo, and up the Do Chhu Valley. We pass archery grounds, large prayer wheels and houses, heading for Aotsho Lhakhang temple. From here we leave the graded track and head upwards on a logging trail reaching the trailhead deep in the forest after a challenging ride. Returning to Aotsho we make our way through the village and onto another track for a fun descent back to Paro. From here we either head home or up the Paro Valley towards Kyichu Lhakhang on road, before returning to Uma Paro on a track where the last steep ascent awaits us.

Duration: 5 - 8 hours

Difficulty: Moderate to Hard (depending on guests' preference)

Guided with picnic, Kona Cinder mountain bike, helmet, gloves Non-bikers please refer to our Activity Menu and liaise with your Uma guide for other options for today, including hiking, a farmhouse visit, shopping and temple visits, archery or simply relaxing.

Overnight : Uma Paro

DAY 7

Uma Paro

Highlights of the Paro Valley–Taktsang Walk. One of the most amazing and important pieces of architecture in Bhutan is Taktsang Goemba, or Tiger's Nest Monastery. Legend has it that this cliffside was where Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) landed on the back of a flying tigress, bringing Buddhism to Bhutan from Tibet. We make an early start to avoid the hot sun during the two-hour climb to the Tiger's Nest viewpoint. Descending steeply, we then climb up to the monastery, passing a waterfall and entering through the main gates which are

decorated with murals. We retrace our steps or if time and energy levels allow, head further up to several remote temples and monasteries. Returning to Uma Paro in the afternoon there's time to relax and enjoy the facilities including the steam rooms, swimming pool or a Bhutanese Hot Stone Bath.

Duration: 7 - 8 hours

Difficulty: Moderate to Hard

Guided with picnic or Taktsang cafeteria

Overnight : Uma Paro

DAY 8

Departure

Depart Bhutan. Druk Air normally departs in the morning, so after breakfast your 10 minute transfer to Paro International Airport will be arranged depending on the flight schedule.

“End of Services”