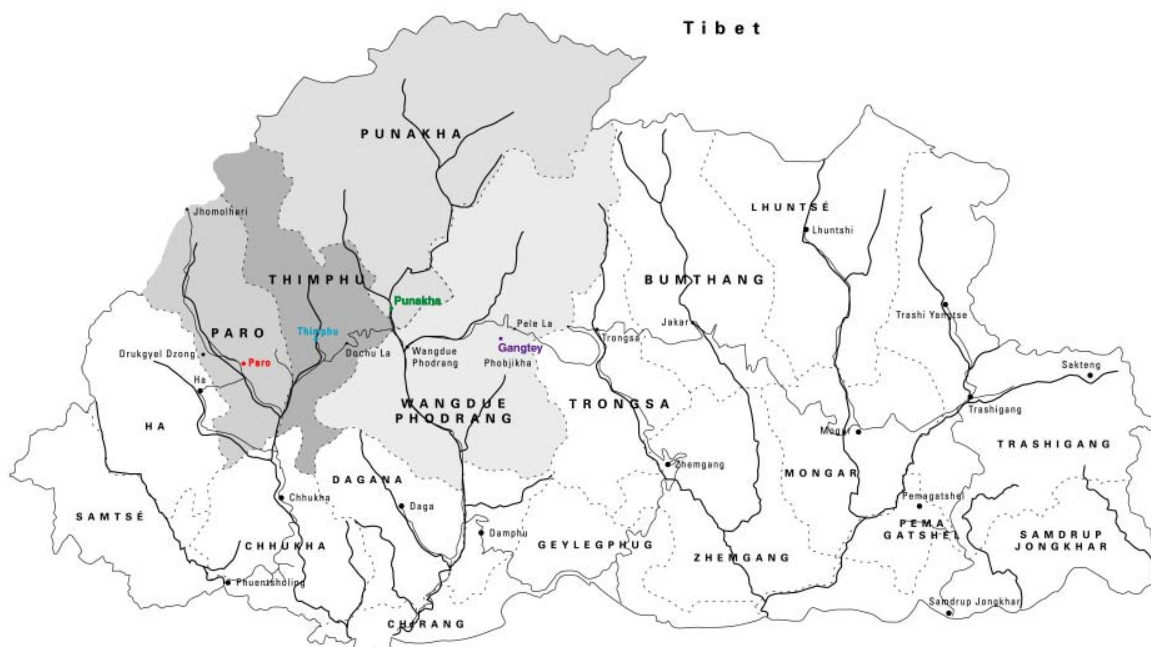


amankora

An Adventure in the Land of the Thunder Dragon 9-NIGHT JOURNEY



The tiny Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan awaits, nestled high in the Himalayas its isolation from the world has cultivated a culture rich in traditions, religion and a benevolent monarchy. The dramatic landscapes, from snow capped peaks and deeply forested slopes to raging, boulder strewn rivers, sit largely undisturbed as endeared environmental initiatives and religious beliefs leave the Kingdom pristine and a jewel of nature. The programme takes you into this ancient Kingdom for an adventure into the hearts and lands of charming farmers, fascinating weavers, enchanting monks and charismatic leaders.

Itinerary

Day 1	Arrival, Paro Valley Exploration, o/n Amankora Paro
Day 2	Paro Valley Exploration, o/n Amankora Paro
Day 3	Transfer to Punakha Valley, o/n Amankora Punakha
Day 4	Punakha Valley Exploration, o/n Amankora Punakha
Day 5	Transfer to Gangtey Valley, o/n Amankora Gangtey
Day 6	Gangtey Valley Exploration, o/n Amankora Gangtey
Day 7	Transfer to Thimphu, o/n Amankora Thimphu
Day 8	Thimphu Valley exploration, o/n Amankora Thimphu
Day 9	Transfer to Paro, Tiger's Nest Pilgrimage, o/n Amankora Paro
Day 10	International Departure

Programme

Day 1: Arrival

From the flight in, weaving through the valley, arrival in Bhutan is like no other. A short transfer brings guests to Amankora Paro and its spa, set inside a forest of pine. The spa offers a range of unique healing and rejuvenating treatments. In the afternoon, there is an opportunity for a quick stroll to the nearby ruins of the 17th century Drukgyel Dzong, a visit to some of the valley's oldest and holiest religious monuments or a ramble down Paro's main street. (*overnight: Amankora Paro*).

Day 2: Tour of Paro

The day starts with a visit to the National Museum, housed in the Ta Dzong (watchtower). Here, an intriguing collection of artefacts provide a wonderful introduction to the rich culture and heritage of the Kingdom. Just a short walk downhill lies the dominating Paro Dzong, a fine example of

Bhutanese historic architecture. From the Dzong, the tour crosses Nyamai Zampa, a traditional cantilever bridge, and guests are then driven to the town temple, built in 1525, to view ancient wall paintings. Paro options include picturesque picnic spots or, perhaps, a visit to a traditional farmhouse to lunch with the family. In the afternoon, hike to nearby villages across the Paro Chhu (river) and view farmhouses and the villagers simple way of life (*overnight: Amankora Paro*).

Day 3: From Paro to Punakha

An early departure and a dramatic drive following the course of the Paro Chhu (Paro River) and Wang Chhu (Wang River) on to the high mountain pass of Dochu La. Sights on the way include one of Bhutan's first fortress monasteries, the 17th century Simtokha Dzong, and ancient wall paintings at the Hongtsho Goemba monastery. The journey continues over the 3,050m mountain pass where on a clear day, towering Himalayan peaks are clearly visible. The descent into Punakha Valley along the Kingdom's only east-west highway, loops above the Punak Chhu before dropping to the valley floor. A short drive onward to the Amankora bridgehead affords access to the lodge with its royal farmhouse and accommodations set amongst the paddy fields and chili plantations. (*overnight: Amankora Punakha*).

Day 4: Punakha Valley

The day in Punakha Valley begins with a hike along the banks of the Mo Chhu through terraces of rice, chillies and cabbage, to the Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten, a three-storey monument housing beautiful and complex paintings built by the Queen of Bhutan that offers commanding views of the valley floor and up to the high mountains of Gasa. Upon descending and crossing back over the river, a short drive up the valley ends with a visit to the impressive Punakha Dzong. This fortress monastery acts as the winter residence of the monastic order's head, with numerous altar rooms and grand courtyards to be explored. A picnic lunch is served on the banks of the Punak Chhu, before visiting the village of Lobesa where a short walk ends at Chimi Lhakhang, the auspicious fertility monastery built in 1499. If time permits, a hike from the lofty remote village of Talo down to Khurutang Village is recommended (*overnight: Amankora Punakha*).

Day 5: Gangtey Valley

Today's onward journey begins with a stop in the picturesque village of Wangdue for a visit to the Wangdue Phodrang Dzong and Radak Naktshang, the village temple. Carrying on, the highway follows the scenic Dang Chhu before climbing through forests of bamboo and oak, and just before crossing the Pele La Pass, a small side road splinters off to the hidden Phobjikha Valley. On arrival there will be time to take lunch at the Gangtey Lodge before visiting the striking 16th century Gangtey Goemba, sitting at the head of the valley, and perhaps strolling through the quaint Gangtey Village. (*overnight: Amankora Gangtey*).

Day 6: Gangtey Valley

This morning will start with a visit to the Black Neck Crane Centre and dependent on the season, time spent in the Centre's nearby hide is a must to view the breeding cranes. Various walks or a mountain bike ride through this magnificent valley are also recommended for the afternoon. Soaking up the beauty of the valley from the Lodge or returning to the revered Goemba for an audience with the Tulkul may be attractive, relaxing alternatives for the day. (*overnight: Amankora Gangtey*).

Day 7: Thimphu Valley

Today's journey back to the capital is lengthy, but the treasures that await are to be much anticipated. Upon arrival in Thimphu you will visit the National Textile Museum, Folk Heritage Museum, and perhaps even 'kora' the Memorial Chorten. Dusk permitting, a short drive up to the BBS tower affords magnificent views across the Thimphu Valley. (*overnight: Amankora Thimphu*).

Day 8: Thimphu Valley

This morning you will head north up the Thimphu Valley stopping to view Tashichoe Dzong, the seat of Bhutan's government and Royal offices, and continuing on past Dechenchoeling, residence of the Queen Mother, to Pangri Zampa, two 16th century buildings that were once the home of the Shabdrung and now house a monastic astrologer training school. Further up the valley a hike to Cheri Goemba, home to the Kingdom's first monastic body, is recommended. Back in Thimphu proper, ample time will be given to browse the local markets and stroll main street for antiques and textile wares of Bhutanese and Tibetan traders. (*overnight: Amankora Thimphu*).

Day 9: Thimphu to Paro Valley/Tigers Nest Excursion

An early start takes you back to Paro for a beautiful and rewarding hike to the Taktsang Goemba (Tiger's Nest), perched on a cliff 900m above the valley floor, with the start point a short drive from Amankora. The Goemba trek is considered the most auspicious pilgrimage in the Kingdom and the views alone make this an inspiring experience. A few mules or horses will be provided to share the burden of the hike up if required. Along the way a picnic lunch will be organized. This late afternoon will be at leisure to relax at the lodge or perhaps further browse Paro town for a few gifts or memorabilia. (*overnight: Amankora Paro*).

Day 10: Departure Day

Early morning transfer to airport for international departure. *Tashi Delek!*