

Best of Bhutan. May 13-21, 2022.

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Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

May 13 or 14 - Those on AFS India will fly from Delhi to Paro on our group flights with Druk Air. Those only doing Bhutan on their own will fly via Delhi. Depart USA May 12 or 13 to meet the group in Delhi by May 14 to join them.

May 14 – Arrive at Paro Land starts

Welcome to the Kingdom of Bhutan! Be sure to look out the window as you fly into Paro where great snow-capped peaks of the inner Himalayas rise up to the heavens. We will be met by our guide at the Paro International airport and check into our hotel in the capital city of Thimphu.

This evening, we'll gather at dinner to learn about the country's history, religion, culture, and spectacular sites that await.

Overnight Thimpu Pelyang Boutique Hotel D

May 15 – Thimpu

After breakfast, we start our day by visiting the acclaimed Painting School - where students learn thirteen different Bhutanese crafts including paper making, masonry, painting, sculpture, embroidery and much more.

Our next stop to visit King's Memorial Chorten - continuously circumambulated by people, murmuring mantras and spinning their prayer wheels. Construction of this landmark monument of peace was the idea of Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk ("the father of modern Bhutan"). Weaving is an integral component of the culture and tradition of Bhutan and we end the day at the Royal Textile Museum and the Royal Textile Academy of Bhutan which preserves and promote this living art.

Overnight Thimpu Pelyang Boutique Hotel B

May 16 – Thimphu Valley

We offer an amazing spiritual option of waking early for a Buddhist Meditation and Yoga class.

After breakfast, we experience the best of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan where we can breathe in fresh air, get calm, go slow, be present and tap into the healing power of nature that Bhutan has to offer. We head to Kuensel Phodrang (Buddha Point) for a stunning overview of the Thimphu valley. You can pay your obeisance and offer prayers to the Buddha, the largest statue in the country and then walk around and take a glimpse of the valley.

Bhutan's first postage stamps were issued in 1962, the same time the first motorable road was opened. Ever since then, Bhutan has been known for the unusual designs and materials of its stamps. We'll visit the post office where you can see the different stamps available in Bhutan. You can even create your very own personalized stamps with any picture downloaded from your phone. Send a post card to your family and friends stamped with your Bhutan trip memories!

In the afternoon, we head to the Takin Preserve to see the national animal of Bhutan – the Takin... a sort of cross between a cow and goat.

We end with visit the peaceful and scenic Zilukha Nunnery, the largest in Bhutan. Known as Druthob Goemba, we'll not just meet the nuns and learn of their beliefs and lifestyle, but have spectacular views of the Tashichho Dzong monastery.

Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu. B

May 17 Thimphu – Punakha

After breakfast, drive to the former capital of Bhutan, Punakha via the Dochula Pass. We'll stop so you can take in the 360-degree vistas of the Eastern Himalayas. The pass has more 108 stupas or chortens dotting the landscape and is a popular place for locals to come with their families.

Perched on a hill in the center of the Punakha valley, is Chimi Lhakhang, known as the temple of fertility. It is widely believed that couples wanting children will be blessed with a child after praying here. A walk through the village near the temple will give you rare glimpses into the daily life and lifestyle of the villagers.

We'll visit the 17th century Punakha Dzong or Palace of Great Happiness located at the junction of the Phochu and Mochu rivers. This majestic gold-domed dzong served as both the religious and the administrative center of Bhutan in the past. Inside are courtyards and religious statuary that hint at the depth of history and spiritual tradition embodied here.

Those with a spirit of adventure should take advantage of our optional offering of white water rafting on Mo Chu River at Punakha. The class 2 trip gives you an unsurpassed view of fields and the royal palaces on the river. Keep your eye open for golden hued Mahseer fish which can grow 9 feet long and that frequents the Punakha River. With any luck, you may spot the elusive freshwater Gangetic Dolphin.

Overnight at the hotel in Punakha- RKPO Green Resort. B

May 18 – The Para Valley

After breakfast, we'll spend the morning driving to the indescribable Para Valley, stopping by legendary Tachogang Lhakhang. This temple was founded by a Tibetan saint who also designed and erected numerous iron suspension bridges in the early 15th century, making parts of Bhutan accessible for the very first time.

Enjoy lunch at a "castle in the Air," the Gangtey Palace Hotel where we will also be treated to a cultural show. The palace offers a bird's eye view of the valley where the majestic Mt. Jomolhari rises at its northern end and its glacial waters plunging through deep gorges to form the Pa Chu (Paro river). The valley's sides are adorned with lush green terraced paddy fields where the bulk of Bhutan's famous red rice grows. Encapsulating a rich culture, scenic beauty and hundreds of myths and legends, this is home to many of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries. Main street Paro offers shops, restaurants and offices in richly carved traditional buildings.

You'll have the afternoon free to explore and shop.

Overnight: Naskel Spa Hotel B/L

May 19 – Para

Today we explore an old hilltop watchtower that is home to the Paro National Museum, housed in. Built to resemble the shape of a conch shell, it houses a valuable collection of antique paintings, festival masks, religious statues and stone carvings.

Paro is best known for the splendid Rinpung Dzong, reached via a covered cantilever, wooden bridge that spans the Paro Chhu. The fortress-monastery's most valuable possession is a giant embroidered tapestry, or thondrol (thangka), depicting the dzong's founding father, Guru Rinpoche. Don't miss the unique painting of Milarepa, considered the master of meditation by the Buddhists. We'll also have the chance to explore the 7th century Temple of Kyichu, one of the oldest temples in Bhutan.

For fun this afternoon, you can try your hand at the national sport of Bhutan – Archery. Our guide will demonstrate and explain the details of the game using the traditional bamboo bow and arrow.

Also enjoy butter tea (Suja) which is prepared with black tea mixed with butter and touch of cream and Himalayan salt.

Late afternoon you could opt for to dress in traditional Bhutan clothes, something that truly sets the locals apart. Men wear the Gho, a knee-length robe. The kira is the national dress for women in Bhutan. It is an ankle-length dress consisting of a rectangular piece of woven fabric.

Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B

May 20 – Tiger's Nest

A true highlight of this journey is a memorable hike to world-famous "Tiger's Nest" or Taktsang Palphug Monastery. This is for the adventurous and physically fit as this is truly a nest - located on the face of a sheer cliff above the floor of the Paro Valley. Only accessible by hiking, it is a strenuous uphill climb including over 700 steps. This sacred pilgrimage site is where legend has it the great tantric mystic, Padmasambhava flew on the back of a tiger and brought the teachings of the Buddhist Dharma to Bhutan. The Monastery clings to a cliff soaring 3,000 feet above the valley floor at an altitude of 10,000 feet.

Along the way, you can hang prayer flags for world peace, or for people who are hungry, ill or in pain (in Buddhism, a prayer flag is considered a blessing). Stop for lunch and admire the breathtaking views from the cafeteria before slowly descending.

In late afternoon, you could opt for Hot Stone Bath at local farm to relax the muscles from a hard day's hike to the famous Tiger's Nest. Very basic and rustic, river rocks are heated and then immersed in a wooden tub to heat the water known for mineral contents. This experience provides an authentic insight into the traditional hot stone bath practiced by the locals (\$36).

For a more luxurious experience, you could hot stone baths at luxury hotels are also available.

Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B/L

May 21 – Depart Para

Check out from hotel and transfer to Paro airport to board your flight home.