Rainbow Tours & Treks
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Thimphu - Bhutan

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Cultural, Festival and Trekking Tour for 12N/13D
March 23 – April 04

Day 1, March 23, 2015: Arrival: Dhaka – Paro

Paro Altitude: 2400m. Paro is a town and seat of Paro district in Bhutan. It is also the home to the only international airport in the country.

The flight to Paro is considered one of the most spectacular flight experiences in the world. While flying in and out of Bhutan, one can see Mt. Everest, Kanchenjunga, Makula, and other high peaks such as Jumolhari, Jichu Drakey, and Tsrim Gang. You will be received by representative of Rainbow Tour & Trek and transferred to your hotel.

National Museum - Ta- Dzong (the watchetower) was built in the 17th century to guard the Paro Rimpong dzong (fortress) below. It was said that the future first king was kept in this tower as a prisoner for a week. It was the third king who restored the Ta-dzong and converted it into the National Museum. The visit to the museum will familiarize you with the Bhutanese way of life and will also acquaint you with the natural and cultural history.

Paro Rimpong Dzong - Regal and imposing, dzongs are arguably among the most distinctive and important structures in Bhutan. This Dzong is the headquarters of the Paro district, housing the head administrator and staff, as well as a the monastic body with about 200 monks. From the dzong, hike down to the bridge and then take a short drive for an opportunity to explore the town of Paro.

Kyichu Lhakhang: Kyichu Lhakhang: It is one of the oldest and most sacred shrines of the Kingdom dating back to 7th century (the other is Jambey Lhakahng in Bumthang). The lhakhang complex is composed of two temples. The first temple was built by Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century and in 1968, H.M. Ashi Kesang, the Queen Mother of Bhutan, built the second temple in original pattern.

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Overnight in Paro

Day 2, March 24, 2015: Paro – Haa – Talung

The drive from Paro to Haa is a gentle uphill climb through forests of blue pine, fir, oak and rhodendrons till the Chelila Pass. The pass at an elevation of 3810 m. provides a panoramic view of the northern and western Himalayan mountain ranges as well as Haa and Paro Valleys. From the Chelila Pass it is drive downhill for 24 Km to the Haa valley and the Haa Township.

Haa is western-most valley in Bhutan bordering on the Tibet region of China. The valley is traversed by the Haa Chhu (river) and its characteristic features are the three almost conical shaped hillocks considered to be holy by the local people - the first hillock is dedicated to Ap Chhundu, the supreme local protective deity of Haa.
After lunch explore Haa Valley and visit it's unique temples, farm houses and Haa township

Ovenight Camp: At Talung village 3150M

Day 3, March 25, 2015: Talung – Saga La (5hrs) (3720m)

Trek to Dongney Tsho (3200m) via Saga La. A gradual hike for approximately one hour through meadows and coniferous forest is followed by a two hour climb to the Saga pass. On a clear day there is a fantastic view on both sides of the pass. The view towards
Paro includes sacred Mount Chomolhari & below in the valley the Drukgyel Dzong & the sacred Taktsang Monastery.Looking to the west the peaks of Haa and the border with Tibet can be seen.From the pass it is all downhill for two hours through mixed conifer
forests and rhododendrons. We camp in an open meadow at Dongney Tsho surrounded with tall firs.To the left is the black

Overnight: Camp

Day 4, March 26, 2015: Tsagala – Drukgyel Dzong Trek, Paro (3hrs)

The first part of today's hike is steeply downhill for about 1.5hr until we reach the Genchu Zam. The hike is through thick vegetation,laughing thrushes, magpies, nutcrackers and pheasants are often seen. There is a beautiful small village comprised of about eight
households and a temple on the left side of the trail. Chodeypu, is set at the base of the mountain Laump Bjara (Foggy Mountain, inhabitated by mountain goats). Another hour from this village will take us to Balakha Chhu where the ancient Haa Planters' Trail
ends.

Here your transport will meet you and transfer you to your hotel.

Overnight in Paro

Day 5, March 27, 2015: Paro - Punakha (137kms/4hrs)

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Punakha Altitude: 1300m/4265ft. Punakha served as the capital of Bhutan during the time of Zhabdrun Ngawang Namkgyal, the founder of Bhutan. Today it is the administrative and religious center of the district and the winter home of Bhutan's Central Monk Body.

Start your morning by enjoying and taking pictures of the Dochula Pass (3150m/10,000ft) with its panoramic views of the Himalayas. The pass is decorated with 108 Druk Wangyel Chorten, which were built to celebrate the stability and progress, brought to Bhutan by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King.

Dochula Pass

Visit the following places:

Chimmi Lhakhang: take a short hike through the rice field to Chimmi Lhakhang, the 15th-century monastery built by Lam Ngawang Chogyal on the spot where his cousin Lam Drukpa Kuenley (popularly known as "the Divine Madman") subdued a powerful demon. This monastery is also referred to as the "Abode of Fertility" and believed that any couple who gets blessing from this temple is blessed with a child in the next year or so.

Punakha Dzong

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Punakha's Dzong: The name means Palace of Great Bliss. This dzong stands magnificently on the spit of land where two rivers (Pho chu and Mo chu) meet. Punakha Dzong has special significance in Bhutanese history as the place where Bhutan's first King, Ugyen Wangchuck, was crowned in 1907. It is also the winter residence for the Je Khenpo (spiritual leader) and the entire central monk body.

Punakha suspension bridge: this is an exciting bridge for photography enthusiasts.

Overnight in Punakha

Day 6, March 28, 2015: Punakha – Attend Talo Festival

Tshechus are grand events where entire communities come together to witness religious mask dances, receive blessings and socialize. In addition to the mask dances tshechus also include colorful Bhutanese dances and other forms of entertainment.

Mask Dance

Today is the last day of Talo Tshechu. The Thongdrel will be unfurled early in the morning and then the different mask dances and folk dances will take place. Talo valley itself is a very beautiful valley with lush green environment rich in both flora and fauna.

The three day Talo Tshechu is well known for its mask and Atsara dances, but an equally popular attraction which has a deep religious and historical significance is the Zhungdra by the Talo dance troupe. The Zhungdra performance particularly Mani Sum (3 songs) are very close to the heart of the Talops (people from Talo). This is because Mani Sum was composed by Meme Sonam Dhondup, the grandfather of Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal (1862-1904), the 5th mind reincarnation of the first Zhabdrung (1594-1651).

The three songs of Mani Sum are performed at the closing item on each day of the three day of the tshechu. The three Songs, Samyi Sala(performed on the first day), Drukpa Dungey (second day) and Thowachi Gangi Tselay on the final day.

Sami Sala was composed when the Talo Sanga Choeling dzong was built which was influenced by the Samyi Monastery in Tibet. Drukpa Dungey tells the story of the Zhabdrung Lineage and Thowachi Gangi Tselay is the thanksgiving song.

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Overnight in Punakha

Day 7, March 29, 2015: Punakha – Phobjikha (78mks/2.3hrs)

Nestled in the inner Himalayas at about 3000 metres above sea level, Phobjikha is a wide alpine wetland valley that is considered the largest and the most significant wetland in the country. It is often cited for the harmonious co-existence of its inhabitants with nature and the valley also holds great cultural significance.

The valley is the most significant wintering ground of the rare and endangered Black - necked cranes in Bhutan and has been protected since time immemorial by the local people's traditional respect for all living beings. Every year, over 300 of the estimated 500 cranes that migrate to Bhutan spend their winter months in this valley.

Additionally, the highly revered Gangtey Monastery that overlooks the wetlands surrounded by subsistence farms and natural forest areas makes Phobjikha a stunningly beautiful and sacred valley. Today, this glacial valley is an attraction not just to tourists but also pilgrims. Besides being the home to the cranes, Phobjikha is also the livelihood base for about 5000 subsistence farmers who have aspirations for economic development.

The Black Necked Cranes

Visit the following places:

Gangtey Gompa: one of the biggest Nyingma temple of the kingdom located on the hilltop

Short Hike: hike through the nature trail and visit local villages and interact with the local people. They are shy but very friendly. The little kids though shy, speaks some English and loves conversing with the foreigners.

Khewa Farm House: Stay the night with the family of Khewa Farm House and experience the authentic Bhutanese lifestyle and the local hospitality.

Overnight in Phobjikha

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Day 8, March 30, 2015: Phobjikha – Thimphu

Thimphu Altitude: 2320m. Thimphu is a small, charming capital city nestled in the heart of the Himalayas with a polulation of about 100,000 people. It is nothing like what a capital city is imagined to be. All houses and buildings are painted and constructed in traditional Bhutanese style.

Thimphu

Morning: Drive to Thimphu after breakfast.

Enroute visit Lamperi Botanical Gardens near Dochula Pass.
The garden is located in the center of a 47 sq. mile botanical park and has over 46 species of rhododendrons

Evening; Explore Thimphu town at your own leisure

Overnight in Thimphu

Day 9, March 31, 2015: Thimphu Sightseeing

Visit the following places in Thimphu:

Memorial Chorten: Memorial Chorten. This stupa was built in 1974 to honor the 3rd King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. This religious structure is circumambulated only in a clockwise direction (reciting prayers and whirling the large red prayer wheels).

Buddha Point – Visit the world's largest sitting Buddha, an immense statue housing a monastery and visitors center. Enjoy a stunning view of Thimphu city from this point.

Please Note: If you would like to bike, please let your guide know ahead of time and he will arrange for it.. There will be an extra renting charge of about $25. The road to Buddha Point is a beautiful place to ride a bike

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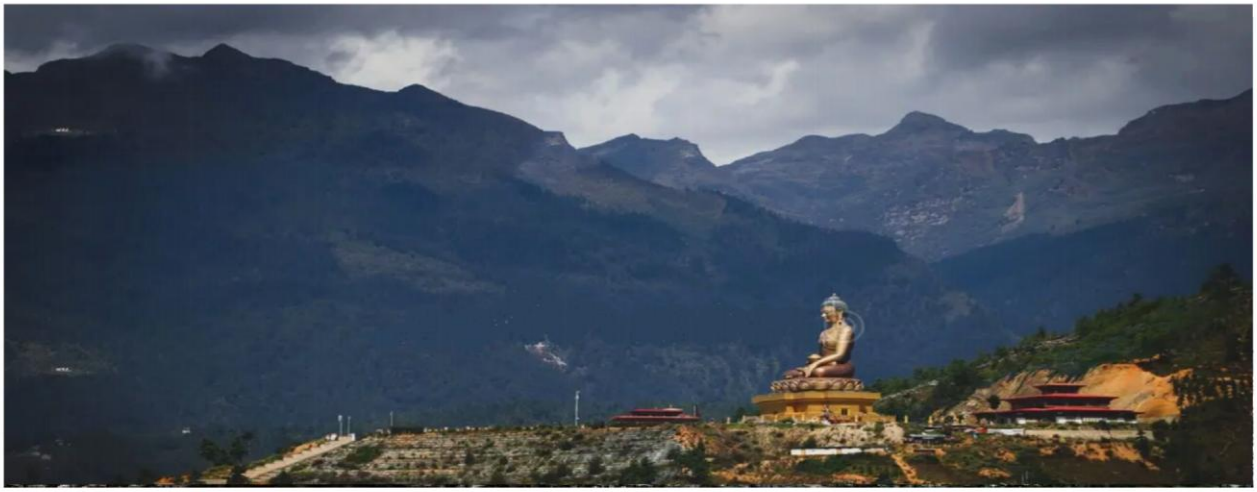
Buddha Point

School of Thirteen Arts & Crafts: It is the primary center of learning for Bhutanese artists. Depending upon the student's interest, one can specialize in any of the thirteen arts and crafts, including painting, weaving, sculptures, blacksmithing, embroidery, etc. It is the best place for visitors to learn about traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts.

National Textile Museum: This musuem is worth a visit to learn about Bhutan's living national art of weaving. The ground floor focuses on cham costumes, while the upper floor introduces the major weaving techniques, styles of local dress and type of textiles made by women and men. There is usually a small group of weavers working their looms inside the shop, which features work from the renowned weaving centre of Lhuentse in northeastern Bhutan

Nunnery: Zilukha Nunnery: This is the biggest nunnery in Bhutan and is a good place to photograph and interact with the nuns and learn about what it takes and feels like to be a Bhutanese Buddhist Nun. You'll see many nuns chanting prayers and turning prayer wheels in Zhlukha nunnery. In Bhutan, girls and women are admitted to nunneries for short to long period of time. They are educated in Buddhism here and after their graduation they dedicate their lives in serving the community at large. Spend some time interacting with the nuns and get to know their beliefs and worldview.

Overnight in Thimphu

Day 10, April 01, 2015: Thimphu Sightseeing

Morning: Hike to Tango Monastery (2hrs in total): In the morning, drive for about forty minutes and hike to the famous Tango Buddhist University. The Tango temple dates back to the 17th century and was built by the forth temporal leader, Gyeltse Tenzin Rabgay. The present reincarnation of this great leader currently resides and studies there. It's also a home to one of the finest paintings in the country. You will have an opportunity to interact with monks and learn about their lives, as well as Buddhism in general. You can also meditate in this monastery.

After picnic lunch, drive back to city and visit the following places:

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Handmade Paper Factory - Although the process of making traditional paper may be simple, a considerable amount of time is required to collect the raw materials, such as the bark of the Daphne plant and certain plant roots for glue. Apart from a small heater to dry the sheets of paper, everything is manually done. Daphne paper is one of the finest papers in the world and is highly recommended for artists.

Zoo – Hike or drive up the National Takin Reserve where a herd of Bhutan's national animals reside. Legend has it that the takin is a cross between a goat and a buffalo, but biologists agree that its nearest relative is the arctic musk ox. This bizarre beast looks as if it was assembled from parts of several animals and vaguely resembles an American bison tinged in golden fur. Male takins have been known to hide by laying spread-eagle on the ground. Enjoy another spectacular view of Thimphu from this point.

Evening: Visit Centenary Farmer's Market: Talk a walk though this market and shop/interact with the local farmers. Thimphu's new weekend market is by far the largest domestic market for the farmers in Bhutan. Farmers come from all over the country to sell their farm products in the market. With its wide assortment of fresh, organic produce, the Farmer's Market has become a favourite spot for tourists and a recreational place for people from all walks of life.Nearby, across a cantilever footbridge, Kuendeyling Bazaam, to the west bank is a collection of stalls selling clothing, textiles and handicrafts.

Centenary Farmer's Market

Overnight in Thimphu

Day 11, April 02, 2015: Paro – Attend full day Festival

The Paro Tshechu (festival) is held every spring in Ringpung Dzong and is one of the most popular and significant festivals in Bhutan. Featuring dances performed by trained monks and laymen in amazing masks and costumes, Tsechus (festivals) are one of the best ways to experience the ancient living culture of Bhutan.

Besides the mask dances and the traditional dances, there will be plenty of other entertainments this day. If you would like to attend the festival in Bhutanese traditional dress, please let your guide know and he will be happy to assist you.

Overnight in Paro

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Day 12, April 03, 2015: Paro – Hike to Tiger's Nest

Hike to Taktshang, Tiger's Nest (3-4hrs)

Bhutan's most scenic icon or the most important landmark, Taktshang the Tiger's nest clings to the side of a steep cliff 300 meters above the Paro valley. The place was first visited by Guru Rimpoche, founder of the tantric form of Buddhism in Himalayan countries, in the 8th century. It was said that he meditated there for about three months. The original temple was built in the 17th century, but tragically, it was consumed by fire in 1998. Like a phoenix, the temple was rebuilt to its fullest glory in 2003. Takshang is considered to be the 10th-holiest site in the Buddhist world. You can visit three different temples inside the main Takshang complex. Riding Ponies provided upon request.

Tiger's Nest

Overnight in Paro

Day 13, April 04, 2015: Departure: Paro – Bangkok

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for departure.

TASHI DELEK