



## RAVEN TOURS AND TREKS

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ADVENTURE - CULTURE - ECO TOURS - COMMUNITY  
TOURS - FESTIVAL - ARCHITECTURE - HISTORY -  
RELIGION



**“Monks standing at the entrance of the Temple”**

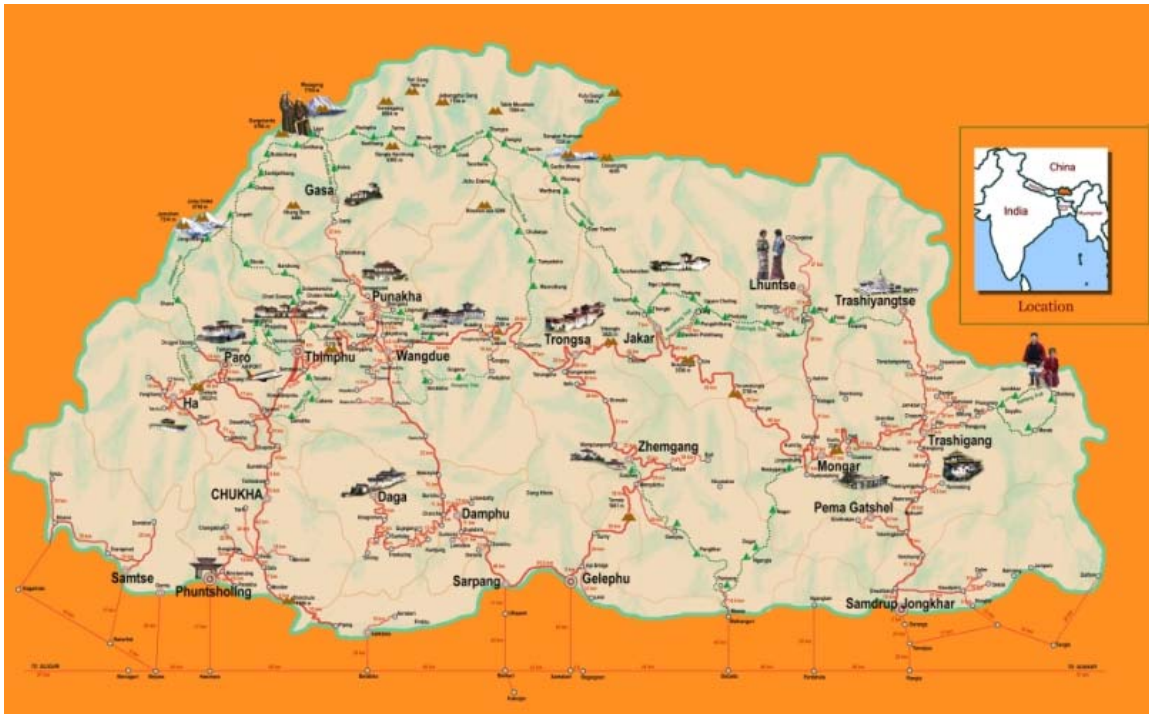
Welcome to paradise on earth; the last Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom, Bhutan. Nestled with the Himalayas; high-altitude landscapes and pristine environment has been kept intact through its unique traditional way of life.

RAVEN TOURS AND TREKS | Norzin Lam, P.O.Box : 1299, Thimphu Bhutan

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## BHUTAN AND ITS HISTORY



**“Map of Bhutan”**

Bhutan is situated in the Eastern Himalayas to the East of Nepal, the Indian State of Sikkim, and the Southern Border of China.

The kingdom has been independent throughout its history, building on a unique cultural base of Buddhism, and the pursuit of Gross National Happiness. It opened its doors to the modern world in the early 1960's, and it is only very recently that today's tourism has begun to be seen in what many call The Last Shangrila.

The majesty of the snow laden Himalayan Mountain, rising abruptly from the plains of the Indian subcontinent, remains a spectacular site that has few parallels.

The name Bhutan itself appears to derive from the ancient Indian term 'bhotana' which means the end of the land of 'bhots' (Tibet). The Bhutanese themselves refer to their country as Druk yul or the 'land of thunder dragon'. Druk means dragon and extends from the predominant drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. It was also known by many

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names such as ridrag gi yul (country of mountainous terrain), Monyul or Monpa (before the visit of Guru), Menjong (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards), Lhojong (southern land of mountainous terrain), Tsenden Koepai Jong (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards), Lhomon Khazhi (before the visit of Zhabdrung).

The lofty and rugged mountain ranges rendered very difficult for any form of communication between one valley and the other. It may be said that the twenty districts that comprise present day Bhutan evolved from the history and traditions of the country with the population settled in secluded fertile valley surrounded and sheltered by the great Himalayan peaks. Living in these isolated valleys which were linked physically to one another only by high mountain passes, the Bhutanese people developed their own customs, traditions and folklore which remained practically untouched over the centuries.

Zhabdrung Nawang Namgyal was not only a great spiritual personality but also a statesman and leader of exceptional ability. He designed the present system of intertwined religious and secular government. He came to Bhutan in 1616, at that time no central authority existed and regional conflict had persisted for centuries. He successfully crushed several foreign invasions, and in the process being a great architect and builder, set up a chain of sturdy monastery- fortresses called dzong which became the centers of religious and civil authority. Subsequently he assumed the title Zhabdrung meaning “the precious jewel at whose feet on summits”. He became the first secular and religious leader in Bhutan.

During the next two centuries civil war was intermittently broke out and the regional penlops became increasingly more powerful. At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century the penlop of Trongsa (who controlled central and eastern Bhutan) overcame his greatest rival, the penlop of Paro (who controlled western Bhutan), and was soon recognized as the overall leader of Bhutan. The penlop of Trongsa, Ugyen Wangckuk, was elected as the first king of Bhutan in 1907 by an assembly of representatives of the monastic community, civil servants and the people.

This monarchy has thrived ever since the present king, His Majesty Jigme Ghesar Namgyel Wangchuk, the first great grandson. After the enthronement as a king in 1974 the present king continued his father’s policy of pragmatic development. He actively pursues industrial progress, country wide education and medical care and at the time Bhutan’s culture remains intact. In 1998, His Majesty the king empowered the national assembly to make all legislative decisions independent to Royal decree. In 1999 television and internet were first introduced in Bhutan.

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**RELIGION**



**" Monks in the Festival"**

Buddhism has always played an important role in the history of the country in the way of life of its peoples. It was Guru Rinpoche in 18th century AD who introduced Buddhist teachings in Bhutan. He was the one who laid the foundation of one of the most important and unifying forces that has sustained the Bhutanese people and contributed to the evolution of their unique cultural and religious traditions.

Bhutan is the only country to maintain Mahayana Buddhism in its tantric vajrayana form as official religion. The main religion followed by the Bhutanese are Drukpa Kagyupa and Nyingmapa. Drukpa kagyupa school of Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion. Hindu is the dominant faith in south.



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Indeed, religion is the focal point for the arts, festivals and for many people. The presence of so many monasteries, temples and stupas, monks and trulkus [reincarnations of high lamas] is indicative of the overarching role religion plays throughout the nations.

### RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AND ECO TOURISM



**“Thick lush forest with the view of snow capped mountains”**

Bhutan operates tourism that fosters understanding, appreciation and conservation of the cultures and environments. Every tour operators are bound to operate in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. Bhutan government is committed to working with the tourists and the people of the host destinations to ensure direct economic benefits at a community level, and to contribute to cultural and environmental conservation. With the continual monitoring of the operations, Bhutan aim to operate beyond best practice guidelines, endeavoring to set the world-wide industry benchmark for responsible tourism operation.

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### **“Jumolhari Trekking Trail”**

While in many other parts of the Himalayas the destruction of forests and loss of habitats have severely reduced wild life population, Bhutan has a rich and varied biological diversity. Forest covers nearly two-third of Bhutan’s total land area. Ecologically, Bhutan is recognized as one of the ten biodiversity hotspots in the world. Some 26.23% of the country’s area is protected through National Parks. In addition, a further 9% has been declared as Biological Corridors, connecting protected areas, and there are series of Conservation Areas intended to protect important conservation sites outside the formal Protected Areas systems. Inventories have indicated that there are more than 7000 species of vascular plants, more than 770 species of avifauna and more than 220 species of mammals, with many species being endemic to Bhutan.

The National Conservation Plan for Bhutan provides a provisional list of 178 species based on predicted occurrence.

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Bhutan's Inventory of Greenhouse Gas under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change shows sequestered 3,321 kilo tonnes of carbon. Therefore, at the global level, we remain a responsible environment friendly country.

### COMMUNITY TOURISM



**“Pictures with the trekking crews and villagers”**

Bhutan also offers lots of community trekking trails that support the park management in their efforts to conserve nature by creating more awareness on natural and environmental issues, through tourism awareness programmes and by introducing socio-economic benefits. Specific measures are put in place to maximize socio-economic benefits and minimize negative impacts from tourism development to support the livelihood of the local community in the area and to create more awareness on natural, environmental, and cultural issues.

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## CULTURES AND TRADITIONS



Bhutan is a unique blend of the old and the new. Here is a country that is slowly opening up to the modern world, but still retaining a fine balance with its ancient traditions. Bhutan is often described as a unique, deeply spiritual and mystical kingdom.



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## FESTIVALS



### **“Mask Dance during the Festival”**

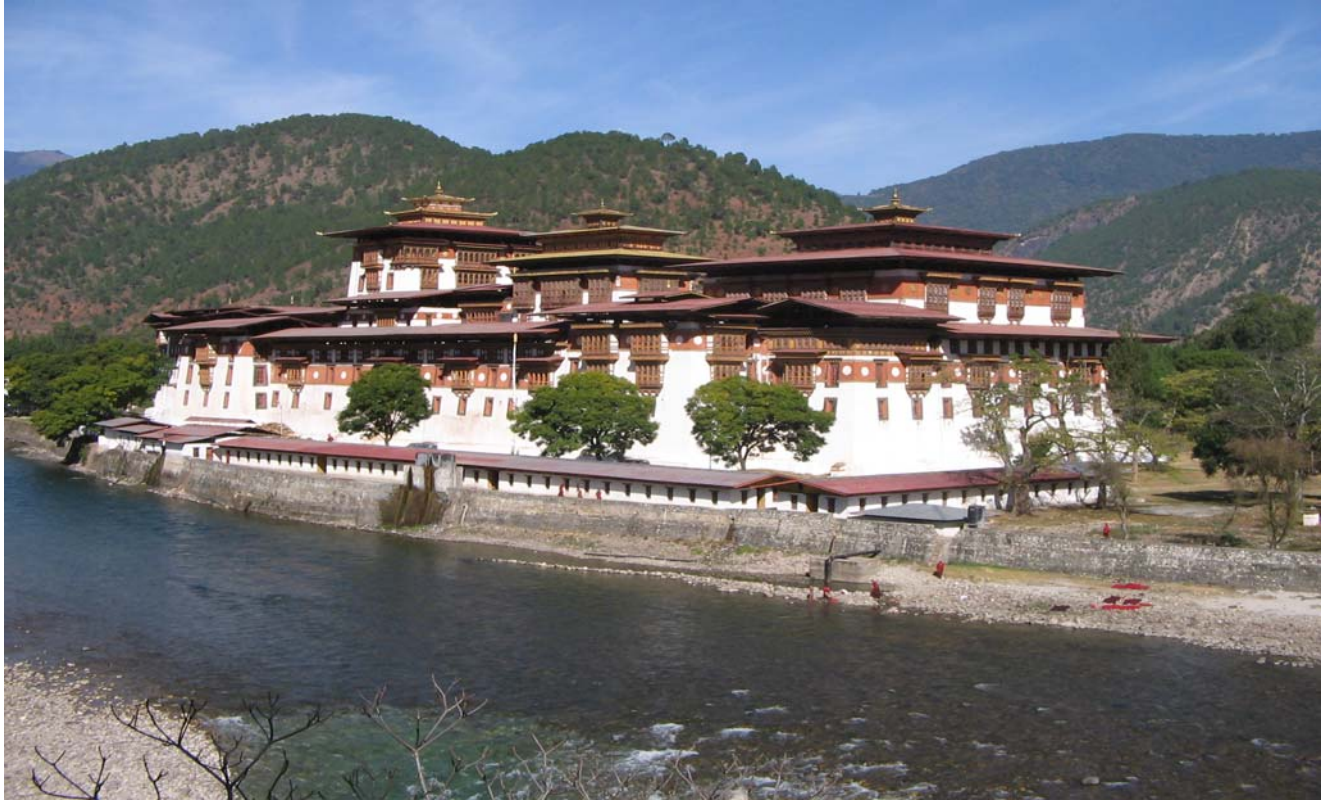
The day begins with the famous mask dances. Festivals in the Land Of Thunder Dragon are rich and happy expressions of its ancient Buddhist culture. These festivals are held in all districts in honor of Guru Rinpoche, the saint who introduced Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. There is simply no better way of experiencing the colour, passion and sheer vibrancy of Bhutan than by attending one of the numerous religious festivals that take place around the year. Tsechus are held on auspicious days and months in the Bhutanese calendar, and last up to four days in which a series of highly stylized masked dance rituals are performed. Attendees adorned in astounding colour gather from far and wide, sporting exotic masks and taking part in the myriad events that are on offer, from games of chance at the local fairs to elaborate mystic rituals. An experience that is not to be missed!

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## ARCHITECTURE



**“Punakha Dzong”**

The main features of Bhutanese architecture are the result primarily of natural conditions; and especially climate. They have drawn inspiration from their older forms and ideas and their majestic physical setting.

Displaying a great sense of innovation, the people have made each dzong (fortress architecture), temple and monastery a unique creation that was designed and built to harmonize with the environment, and to fulfill a certain function. The Bhutanese people seem to have been unusually and dramatically influenced by this environment, and consequently they have created a very gentle and elegant architectural form. Secular or religious, many of these buildings are true masterpieces, and will demand viewing by any discerning visitor to this enchanting country.

### ADVENTURE



#### **“During Jumolhari Trek”**

Trekkers start from an altitude of around 2400 meters and cross passes as high as 6000 meters. The lower altitude winter trekking routes that range from 1300 meters to 1800 meters enable the less hardy trekkers to enjoy the beauty of a semi tropical climate.

Whatever the Bhutan trek you choose, it will be special, as you are surrounded by views of mountain ranges that soar to heights above 7000 meter, and leave the visitor with indelible memories of same nature’s rare gifts of splendor and majesty.

The Bhutanese landscape is ideally suited for mountain bike riding. It presents a challenge, from its myriad of sleepy hillside and valley hamlets and picturesque terraced farms, to its cress crossing paddy field and trails. The terrain is truly varied and different, and offers the visitor something unusual in this sport.

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**TEXTILES AND HANDICRAFTS**



*“Students painting the religious Thangka”*

Bhutanese textiles are renowned for their distinctive colors and patterns, which have been inspired by nature. The use and contemplation of colors and pattern in art and craft also have religious significance, as they form an integral part of worship and practice. Because of its high profit and national significance, weaving receives Royal Patronage.

