



CHEESEMAN'S ECOLOGY SAFARIS

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Bhutan

Spirit of the Himalayas

October 31 to November 24, 2022



Punakha Dzong
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

SAFARI OVERVIEW

Discover this most scenic and nature-rich region situated on the edge of the vast Himalayan range. Join the quest for the rare black-necked crane, white-bellied heron, vibrant pheasants, acrobatic langurs, and more. This mountainous gem between India and China engulfs you in Bhutan's strong culture, not only in its unique architecture and abundant prayer flags, but also in its adoration and respect for nature. Visit dzongs and monasteries, including a hike to the famous cliff-side Tiger's Nest Monastery. Discover the diverse range of species inhabiting the sub-tropical southern regions. Experience the wonder and beauty of Bhutan through the eyes of our Bhutanese leader, Hishey Tshering.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Spend almost three weeks in the highlands and lowlands of Bhutan beholding its vibrant bird life and impressive landscapes.
- Explore Bhutan's largest wetlands in the "Valley of the Cranes," the wintering ground for endangered black-necked cranes.
- Search for over a dozen intriguing mammals, including the endemic golden langur.
- Watch a Buddhist festival with colorful costumes, brightly painted masks, and traditional folk music.
- Visit the Tiger's Nest Monastery and other temples to experience Bhutan's Buddhist culture.

LEADERS: Hishey Tshering plus an assistant guide and driver.

DAYS: 25, including estimated travel time.

GROUP SIZE: 10.

COST: \$9,425 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare (except for one-way flight between Bumthang and Paro), singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 7.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Oct 31–Nov 2	Fly to Bangkok, Thailand.		
Nov 3	Fly from Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan and then 90-min drive, with stops en route, to Thimphu. Altitudes for the day will be between 7,300 and 8,000ft.	Ariya Hotel, Thimphu	L, D
Nov 4	Birding and cultural sightseeing around the capital. Maximum altitude 9,000ft.		B, L, D
Nov 5	Thimphu to Punakha. The drive is 90min with stops en route. Drive over Dochola pass at 10,000ft and descend all the way to Punakha at 4,600ft.	Dhumra Farm Resort, Punakha	B, L, D
Nov 6	Spend the morning hours around Punakha and then drive to Phobjikha, driving over 11,000ft and ultimately settling at 9,600ft for the night.	Dewachen, Phobjikha	
Nov 7	Hike around the valley and enjoy the arrival of the black-necked cranes from Tibet.		
Nov 8	The four-hour drive to Chummey will take you past the historic Trongsa Dzong.	Chummey Nature Resort, Chummey	
Nov 9	Witness a festival and hike around the valley. If time permits, you may drive to a monastery at about 12,000ft to search for the majestic Monal pheasants.		
Nov 10	A fairly long drive to Yongkhola will take you over the Thrimsingla pass at about 13,000ft and descend all the way to Yongkhola at 5,500ft where you will be based for four nights. The road is under construction, so expect a car massage!	Trogon Villa, Yongkhola	
Nov 11–13	Bird and hike in this beautiful area.		
Nov 14	Drive to Panbang, located in the sub-tropics. You will see lots of big birds such as hornbills as well as the rare golden langurs, which are endemic to Bhutan and a small part of India adjoining Bhutan. Today is also a fairly long drive due to the non-existence of accommodations en route. Altitude is about 900ft.	Panbang Eco-lodge, Panbang	
Nov 15	Visit Manas National Park.		

Nov 16	Drive to Tingtibe. Lots of golden langur along en route; you will stop to watch and photograph them. At Tingtibe you will try to look for the very rare white-bellied heron. The estimated global population of this very rare species is less than 60 individuals, and about half of the world's population is found in Bhutan. In fact, an International Conference on this very rare bird is going on in Bhutan during the time of your trip. The lodging here is very basic with squatting toilets.	T Wang Hotel, Tibgtibe	
Nov 17	Drive to Gelephu, located at the border with India. The drive is about three hours and will take you over a small pass at about 6,000ft before descending to the border town.	Kuku Grand, Gelephu	
Nov 18	Birding around Gelephu, where you will see Indian peafowl, owls, hornbills, dollar birds, etc.		
Nov 19	Gelephu to Tsirang. The drive for the first 30min will be along the border and after you arrive at Sarpang, the road will snake its way upwards. Today's altitudinal gain is about 4,000ft.	Damphu Resort, Tsirang	
Nov 20	It's about a five-hour drive from Tsirang to Paro on a good road. En route, you pass a captive breeding center of the white-bellied heron and if Hishey can get permission, we will visit it. Your Bhutan host was pivotal in initiating the white-bellied heron project and he hopes he may get the required permission. Hopefully you will be able to see some in the wild during the drive. After we arrive at Lobesa, we shall be back on the road that we left on November 5.	Drukchen, Paro	
Nov 21-22	Sightseeing around Paro including hiking to the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery.		
Nov 23	Fly from Paro to Bangkok to connect with flights home.		B
Nov 24	Arrive home.		

LEADER

Hishey Tshering

Hishey Tshering is an avid birder, a football (soccer) fanatic, and a keen conservationist. Prior to establishing the company (Bhutan Birding & Heritage Travels), Hishey worked for the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) as its Communications Officer. During his years at RSPN, he played a pivotal role in the protection of the black-necked cranes. In 1998 he worked with Dr. George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, on the first ever color-banding and radio-collaring of the back-necked cranes to study their migratory route.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Oct 31–Nov 2 ~ Travel to Bangkok, Thailand

Fly to Bangkok, Thailand for an overnight. Lose a day if going east across the International Date Line.

Nov 3 ~ Fly from Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan

Fly from Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan with views of Himalayan peaks towering through the clouds. Hishey will meet you in Paro to start your journey through Bhutan.

Nov 4–22 ~ Explore the natural and cultural wonders of Bhutan

Bhutan is a country and culture that embodies in living in the moment. As this nation is experiencing rapid growth and a newly emerging tourist industry, the itinerary must be flexible to take advantage of the best Bhutan has to offer. Your trip will start and end in Paro, driving through many districts (or dzongkhag) to visit the best regions for bird watching, acrobatic langurs, beautiful mountain scenery, and unique cultural experiences. Hike to Bhutan's famous Tiger's Nest Monastery and see many other unforgettable sites. Read on for highlights of each district you may visit.



Striated Laughingthrush
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

Paro ~ Chele La Pass, Paro Valley, Tiger's Nest Monastery

Scenic Chele La Pass is the highest road in Bhutan (close to 13,000ft) with excellent views when skies are clear. A pre-dawn departure could uncover nocturnal species such as gray nightjar or leopard cat. Explore different habitats as you climb to the pass and search for three different pheasant species. Explore beautiful Paro Valley and the ruins of the Drukgyel Dzong. The valley's blue pine forest is home to laughingthrushes (black-faced and chestnut-crowned) and chestnut-tailed minla, and you may find ibisbill patrolling the Paro River.

Bhutan's most famous site is the Tiger's Nest Monastery, impressively built on the side of a cliff just west of Paro. Halfway up you may relax at a cafe and enjoy the view of the monastery across a gorge. If you continue, you will discover increasingly dramatic views leading to a picturesque waterfall and bridge just below the monastery. You may tour the inside to see the rocks protruding from within, however photography is not permitted inside. Keep an eye out for monkeys playing in the trees near the trail.

Thimphu ~ Dochu La Pass, Capital city of Thimphu

Dochu La, at 10,000ft, is one of the most scenic passes in Bhutan. On a clear day, Dochu La affords superb views of the Himalayan range to the north. In addition to the natural scenery, visitors to the Dochu La are drawn to the 108 Buddhist stupas (a place for meditation) built on a hill decorated by colorful prayer flags. In Bhutan's capital city of Thimphu, you will explore more natural and cultural attractions. Visit a weaving shop and traditional papermaking workshop to watch students learn these respected crafts. See the national mammal, the takin, protected in an extensive nature reserve on the edge of town or take an optional hike up to the Cheri Monastery.

Jigme Dorji National Park

Explore Jigme Dorji National Park, the second largest national park in Bhutan, covering parts of five districts (Gasa, Thimphu, Punakha, Paro, and Wangdue Phodrang). You may encounter Assam macaques, common grey langurs, and goral (a native goat), plus many birds, such as the crested

kingfisher, rufous-bellied woodpecker, oriental cuckoo, and large hawk-cuckoo. With luck, you'll see the rare yellow-rumped honeyguide feeding on the honeycomb of rock-bee hives.

Punakha ~ Punakha Dzong, search for White-bellied Heron

Travel alongside the mighty Puna Tsang Chu River to the town of Punakha, home to the majestic Punakha Dzong, the winter residence of the central monastic body. Search the river for Pallas's fish-eagle and the white-bellied heron, the world's rarest heron. In the semi-tropical zone of this district, look for mountain hawk-eagle, great barbet, and the rare Ward's trogon.

Wangdue Phodrang ~ Pele La Pass, Phobjikha Valley

Take in spectacular views over Pele La Pass between the districts of Trongsa and Wangdue Phodrang. Monals, a type of pheasant, and the great parrotbill are possibilities here. You may also encounter mammals, like goral and serow, wild herbivores that do well in these habitats around Pele La. Descend into the glacial valley of Phobjikha, known as the "Valley of the Cranes." This valley has the largest wetland in Bhutan and is one of the winter homes of about 350 rare and endangered black-necked cranes. These cranes typically start to arrive the end of October and migrate back to Tibet in early March. The annual presence of the cranes has made Phobjikha one of the most important wildlife preserves in the kingdom. Listen to the cranes calling in the pine forest and while flying overhead.

Trongsa ~ Trongsa Dzong, Golden Langurs

Trongsa is best known for the Trongsa Dzong, the largest dzong in Bhutan. Take in the beautiful surroundings and impressive architecture, learn about the dzong's historical importance, and perhaps see Assam macaques climbing the walls. If open, you'll also visit the Tower of Trongsa



Himalayan Monal
© Sonam Dorji

Museum. The watchtower, up on the hill, has great views and interesting cultural and historical artifacts. The district is also a good place to find rare golden langurs, a primate found only in Bhutan and parts of India.

Bumthang ~ Orgyenchoing Palace, Chumey Valley

In addition to spectacular landscapes, a highlight of your exploration of Bumthang will be the Orgyenchoing Palace, which has been converted into a fabulous museum providing an insight into the times prior to the establishment of hereditary monarchy in 1907. Search for new birds in the blue pine forests of Chumey Valley including the stunning, iridescent Himalayan monal, a pheasant that frequents the Tharpaling Monastery. In the open fields, you may see beautiful rosetfinches and rufous-breasted accentor with Himalayan griffon soaring above.

Mongar ~ Bird diversity in lowland forests, Thrumsingla National Park

Mongar is the easternmost and lowest elevation of the districts and is one of the best birding places in Asia with its rich, subtropical, broadleaf forests. Look for blood pheasants and flocks of snow pigeons flying across the valley or foraging in the farmlands. Travel through Thrumsingla National Park and a variety of ecological zones between Bumthang and Mongar, stopping for a hike through rhododendron forest at Thrumsingla Pass. Search for satyr tragopan and rufous-necked hornbill and other birds that flourish in Bhutan's lowlands. Hishey loves birding in this area so much he built Trogon Villa, so his tour groups would have a comfortable base to explore this wildlife-rich region of

Bhutan. In addition to abundant bird life, search for capped langurs swinging playfully in the trees. A night drive offers you the opportunity to see nocturnal species.

Zhemgang District

During your time in the Zhemgang District, along the Zhemgang-Tingtibi Road, you may find many special species, like fire-tailed myzornis, cutia, sultan tit, yellow-cheeked tit, several species of fulvettas and laughingthrushes, golden babbler, rust-fronted barwing, red-headed trogon, beautiful nuthatch, blue-bearded bee-eater, pin-tailed pigeon, white-browed and speckled piculet, and more. Watch the endemic golden langur, common in this region, and encounter the black giant squirrel and yellow-throated marten while exploring the mixed broadleaved evergreen forests at elevations from 2,000 to 8,000ft.

Gelephu Region

The majestic Indian peafowl is common around the Gelephu region, which borders the Indian State of Assam. You may encounter all four species of hornbills found in Bhutan - the rufous-necked, great, and wreathed hornbill, and the oriental pied-hornbill. Other large colorful birds you may find are the Indian roller, dollar bird, red-naped ibis, parakeets, and several waterbirds.

Panbang and Nganglam

This region has recently become accessible to tourists now that new roads connect it to the rest of Bhutan. The Royal Manas National Park, the oldest park in Bhutan, lies in this region and is situated along the magnificent emerald Manas River. This park is known for its remarkable, diverse flora and fauna where more than 70% of Bhutan's bird species are found, three of which are critically endangered: white-bellied heron, white-rumped vulture, and red-headed vulture. The number of species within the park includes 558 plant species, 65 mammal species, 60 fish species, and 180 butterfly species. You'll experience the dense towering mountains punctuated with rivers and small streams in extensive tropical monsoon forests, patches of natural grasslands, moist tropical forest, and dense oak forest.

Bhutan's festivals and Buddhist culture

Bhutan is a country of festivals. The most important are the religious dance festivals, known as Tshechus, which are held in different districts throughout the year. In a swirl of color and noise, the gods and demons of Buddhist mythology come to life. Masked and sword dances and other rituals are performed by monks and villagers. The performances have deep religious significance but are not somber affairs. The atsaras (traditional clowns of the Tshechu) add color and merriment to the festival with their bawdy antics.

The Buddhist culture of Bhutan is visible throughout the country, with prayer flags and stupas adorning hillsides and mountain passes. Hishey will enlighten you with stories of his country's history, including the arrival of Buddhism and Bhutan's peaceful transition from monarchy to democracy. He'll interpret tales depicted in the brightly painted murals covering walls in monasteries and dzongs. Because of the strong connection to nature, the country's cultural history is strongly tied to its natural history.



Festival
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

Nov 23 ~ Fly from Paro to Bangkok

Hishey will transfer you to the airport for your group flight from Paro back to Bangkok. Overnight in Bangkok or connect with a late-night flight homeward.

Nov 24 ~ Arrive home

COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$9,425
Single Supplement	\$1,200

Costs are per person, double occupancy, not including airfare (except for one-way flight between Bumthang and Paro), singles extra. See *Included* and *Not Included* sections for more details.

If you are a single traveler, we will find a roommate for you, but if we cannot find you a roommate, we may charge you a single supplement. Single rooms cost extra and are subject to availability.

Payment Schedule

Payment	Due Date	Amount per Person
Deposit	Due now to reserve your space	\$500
Second	January 15, 2022	\$2,000
Final	June 15, 2022	Remaining Balance

Payments are due based on the schedule above. All reservations require a deposit to confirm reservation of your space.

Cancellations

Until the Final Payment due date, deposits are refundable except for a cancellation fee of \$150 per person, which can be applied toward another trip if reserved within six months of the cancelled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferrable. No refunds are given after the Final Payment due date.

Included

- All leaders, transport, park entry fees, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- One-way flight between Bumthang and Paro.
- Airport transfers in Bhutan.
- Accommodations for the nights of November 3 through November 22.
- Meals from lunch on November 3 through breakfast on November 23.
- Bhutan visa fee.
- Drinking water in the bus and during all included meals.
- Gratuities to airport and hotel porters in Bhutan.
- Trip Materials - information about flights, packing, entry and departure requirements, airport transfers, gratuities, etc.

Not Included

- All airfare (except flights listed as included), airport and departure taxes, and excess baggage fees. Round-trip airfare is approximately \$600 to \$1,800 between the US and Bangkok, depending on origin, plus approximately \$1,115 for round-trip flights between Bangkok and Paro.
- Accommodations, transportation, and meals in Bangkok.
- Gratuities – tipping is always discretionary. However, we will add a gratuity of \$300 per participant (\$15 per participant per day for November 3 to November 22 with Hishey's staff) to your final payment.
- Emergency medical and evacuation insurance and trip cancellation insurance. For more information see www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance.
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, medical costs or hospitalization, room service, beverages other than water, items not on the regular menu, etc. If you have special dietary needs, please indicate them on your Reservation Form.

SIGN UP

Please contact us first to check availability, reserve your space, and obtain a Reservation Form. To confirm your reservation, we require a deposit and signed form from each participant.

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OTHER DETAILS

Climate

The weather in November-December is generally dry with clear skies but be prepared for a slight chance of rain or snow. Temperatures can vary greatly throughout Bhutan, so come prepared. Expect daytime temperatures in the 50s°F (10°C) at higher altitudes to the 70s°F (21°C) at lower altitudes in the southern region. Expect early morning and nighttime temperatures around 10 to 40°F (-12 to 4°C) at higher altitudes to the 50s°F (10°C) at lower altitudes in the southern region.

Fitness Level and Elevation

You will visit high elevations; your overnights at these high elevations range from about 4,500ft at Punakha and Yongkhola to about 9,500ft at Phobjikha. Most walks are less than 1mi with some up to 2mi at a slow pace with stops to observe wildlife. The most strenuous walk is the optional hike up to the Tiger's Nest Monastery (10,240ft). Most of the trail is steep with switchbacks or stairs, but you can stop halfway at a viewpoint and decide if you want to continue or just enjoy the view from there. The hike up and back can take about 3 to 4 hours depending on your pace and how much time you spend at the monastery.

Accommodations

All lodges and hotels have electricity and private bathrooms with showers and flush toilets. Lodging throughout the trip is comfortable and ranges from deluxe hotels to simple and rustic lodges in remote

locations; some may have only a squat toilet. All have the architectural style characteristic of Bhutan and many have beautiful grounds and/or views to take in.

Transportation

You will drive across Bhutan in Hishey's "Grus Mobile," a roomy, 22-seat Toyota Coaster bus with large windows that open. Although you'll often stop to enjoy the pristine Himalayan air and to photograph the stunning scenery, you may at times have to photograph from the vehicle. Expect winding mountain roads and sometimes slow, bumpy drives, depending on road conditions. In Bhutan distances are usually estimated by time rather than by mileage (the average driving speed is 15mph), and roadwork is widespread. Because you look for birds along the roads you may spend a full day traveling from one destination to another.

Flights

Unless listed as included, airfare is not included in trip costs. Detailed logistical information and the contact information for our recommended flight-ticketing agent are included in the Trip Materials we will send you.

Flights you (or a travel agent) book: Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand (BKK) in time for an overnight on November 2 to connect with your early-morning group flight to Bhutan on November 3. Depart Bangkok, Thailand (BKK) anytime on November 24.

Flights we book for you: The round-trip flights between Bangkok and Paro; we'll add the flight cost to your final trip balance. The one-way flight between Bumthang and Paro is included in the trip cost.

Terms and Conditions

Read our current Terms and Conditions at <https://cheesemans.com/terms-and-conditions>.

Conservation

Our company ethos has always regarded conservation as inseparable from responsible tourism. We struggle with the dilemma that traveling worldwide expends climate-changing carbon. However, we wholeheartedly believe that traveling with us will cultivate your passion for conserving our beautiful world while stimulating each destination's local economy. We encourage you to explore the various ways in which Cheesemans' operates within this context:

- **Ecotourism and Conservation for Bhutan** (<https://cheesemans.com/ecotourism-and-conservation-in-Bhutan>).
- **Cheesemans' Trips are Carbon Neutral:** As of June 1, 2022, our trips are carbon neutral (<https://cheesemans.com/carbon-neutral>).
- **Offsetting your Travel to/from our Trip:** We ask you to pledge to offset the carbon emissions for your travel to and from our trips. Use this tool to calculate your emissions and purchase your carbon offset today through Sustainable Travel International, or through your favorite carbon offsetting organization (<https://cheesemans.com/carbon-calculator>).

FAQS

Where is Bhutan?

The Kingdom of Bhutan is the size of Switzerland, nestled between Tibet and India, and is truly one of Earth's most remote countries. More than 60% of the country is still forested with farms dotting the countryside. Bhutan has 20 peaks over 23,000ft, a wonderful place to photograph stunning mountain scenery, while also

seeing spectacular birds and charming mammals. The Buddhist philosophy respecting all living things alongside a progressive governmental approach to environmental preservation and promotion of Bhutan's unique culture and traditions have maintained an environment where wildlife flourishes.

What wildlife can you expect to see?

Bhutan lies in an area designated as one of the world's top ten biodiversity hotspots. More than 600 bird species live in Bhutan, including some of the most exotic and rare species in the eastern Himalayas. Because of their abundance, birds are the majority of wildlife you will encounter. Bhutan is also home to at least 165 mammal species, including langurs, macaques, red pandas, Himalayan black bears, alpine musk deer, and in the alpine meadows, takins (endangered) and yaks grazing on grasses along mountainsides. You may find tiger tracks along the bases of the foothills to above the tree line, although this predator is seldom seen.

When is the best time to visit Bhutan?

Generally, October to December and March to May are the best times to visit Bhutan – rainfall is low, and temperatures are conducive to active days of sightseeing. (The Monsoon season occurs June to August.) Choosing spring or fall will depend on your priorities. In the fall, days are usually very pleasant with clear skies and sunshine, providing the best opportunities to view Himalayan peaks. November to December is the best time to see black-necked cranes, and spring is the best time to spot a satyr tragopan. In the spring, the mountains are covered with blooming rhododendrons and the bird life is more numerous and more active, although overcast skies and wind are more common, especially at passes. In spring you tend to find about twice as many bird species compared to fall.

What is a dzong?

A dzong is a fortress, which continues to serve as Bhutan's administrative and religious center. You'll also see monasteries, including the famous Tiger's Nest, and smaller chortens (stupas), all of which are important features of Bhutan's religion and culture. You will have opportunities to examine traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts, which represent a vital aspect of Bhutan's living heritage as well as its spiritual and intellectual life.

Why is visiting Bhutan so special?

Until recently, Bhutan's remoteness, steep terrain, and tightly controlled tourism ensured that its incredible beauty and fascinating people remained known only to a few. Bhutan was closed to outsiders until 1960; its first roads were built in 1961 and no tourists were officially permitted until 1974. Bhutan is a developing country, yet its unique agrarian Buddhist culture is still intact. You will encounter red-robed monks and herders with their cows or yaks on the road along with vehicles.