

# Bhutan

## *Spirit of the Himalayas*

November 3 to 27, 2026



Golden Langur  
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

## SAFARI OVERVIEW

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Explore the awe-inspiring landscapes and rich biodiversity of **Bhutan**, a **Himalayan kingdom** where cultural heritage and wildlife conservation are deeply intertwined. Journey from subtropical lowlands to alpine valleys in search of Bhutan's most captivating wildlife, including **Black-necked Cranes**, golden langurs, and vibrant **Himalayan Pheasants**. Marvel at sacred temples and ancient dzongs nestled in the mountains, and hike to the iconic **Tiger's Nest Monastery** perched high above the Paro Valley. Led by renowned Bhutanese naturalist Hishey Tshering, this unforgettable 21-day immersive safari offers rare wildlife encounters, spiritual traditions, and dramatic Himalayan scenery. Designed for nature lovers and cultural explorers, this trip offers a rare glimpse into the heart of the Himalayan kingdom.

### WHY CHOOSE THIS TRIP?

- **Immerse in Bhutan's Rich Cultural Heritage:** Visit ancient monasteries, including the Tiger's Nest Monastery, dzongs, and traditional villages to experience the unique Himalayan Buddhist culture.

- **Explore Pristine Himalayan Landscapes:** Traverse dramatic landscapes via mountain passes like Dochula, Pele La, and Thrumshing La, with panoramic Himalayan views and diverse forest zones.
- **Witness Iconic Wildlife in Their Natural Habitat:** Spot intriguing mammals, including the endemic golden langur and vibrant bird species in Bhutan's protected national parks.
- **Watch Traditional Festivals:** Experience vibrant Bhutanese festivals with colorful masks, dances, and rituals that offer a deep insight into local traditions.
- **Explore Bhutan's Largest Wetlands:** Travel to the "Valley of the Cranes," the wintering ground for Black-necked Cranes.

**LEADERS:** Hishey Tshering, plus an assistant guide and driver.

**DAYS:** 25, including estimated travel time.

**GROUP SIZE:** 10.

**COST:** \$9,750 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 9.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Nov 3–5	<b>Fly to Bangkok, Thailand.</b>		
Nov 6	<b>Arrival and drive to Thimphu.</b> Fly from Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan and then drive to Thimphu.	Hotel in Thimphu	L, D
Nov 7–25	<b>Explorations of Bhutan.</b> Explore the natural and cultural wonders of Bhutan. You will journey across the country from west to east, exploring a stunning variety of ecosystems and cultural landmarks. Your days will be filled with expertly guided birdwatching excursions in top biodiversity hotspots like Tingtibi, Yongkhola, and Royal Manas National Park, where you'll search for rare species such as the Beautiful Nuthatch, Ward's Trogon, and White-bellied Heron. You'll hike to sacred sites including the Khamsum Yulley Chorten and the world-famous Tiger's Nest Monastery, and experience vibrant local traditions at the Mongar Tsechu festival. Along the way, you'll visit iconic dzongs, stroll through terraced valleys, and learn about conservation efforts in places like Phobjikha Valley, winter home of the Black-necked Cranes. This itinerary offers an enriching blend of wildlife encounters, scenic drives, spiritual sites, and cultural immersion in the heart of the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.	Various lodges in Bhutan	B, L, D
Nov 26	<b>Fly from Paro to Bangkok to connect with flights home.</b>		B
Nov 27	<b>Arrive home.</b>		

## LEADER

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Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris carefully selects leaders who are experts in their field to ensure that your experience is the best it can be. One leader with an assistant guide will provide a range of expertise for your trip.



### Hishey Tshering

Hishey Tshering is a passionate birder, devoted football (soccer) enthusiast, and committed conservationist. He served as the Communications Officer for the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN), where he played a key role in safeguarding the Black-necked Cranes. In 1998, Hishey collaborated with Dr. George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, on the groundbreaking first-ever color-banding and radio-collaring of these cranes to track their migratory patterns.

## DETAILED ITINERARY

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### Nov 3–5 ~ Travel to Bangkok, Thailand

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

### Nov 6 ~ 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 7–25 ~ Explore the natural and cultural wonders of Bhutan

Bhutan is a country and culture that embodies living in the moment. As this nation is experiencing rapid growth, the itinerary must be flexible to take advantage of the best Bhutan has to offer. Your trip will start and end in Paro. From Paro you begin your journey through the country, have binoculars and camera ready in hand as the beauty of Bhutan unfolds immediately. Keep an eye out for the enigmatic Isisbill, one of the most sought-after Himalayan shorebirds, and the beautiful Wallcreeper as you venture further into the country. You will drive through many districts (or dzongkhag) to visit the best regions for bird watching, acrobatic langurs, beautiful mountain scenery, and unique cultural experiences. Among many unforgettable sites along the way, you will return to Paro and hike Bhutan's famous Tiger's Nest Monastery. Read on for highlights of each district you may visit.

#### Thimphu ~ Capital city of Bhutan

In Bhutan's capital city, Thimphu, you will discover a wealth of natural and cultural attractions. Visit a weaving shop and traditional papermaking workshop. 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.



Assam Macaque

© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

#### 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 rarely seen Yellow-rumped Honeyguide feeding on the honeycomb of rock-bee hives.

### **Punakha ~ Dochu La Pass, Punakha Dzong**

The drive from Thimphu to Punakha is one of the most scenic and memorable journeys in Bhutan, offering a blend of natural beauty, cultural stops, and opportunities for light adventure.

Starting from Thimphu, the road ascends gradually through pine forests and small villages before reaching the Dochula Pass at 10,200 ft. This pass is a highlight of the drive, especially in November, when the skies are typically crystal clear, offering stunning panoramic views of the eastern Himalayas. On a clear day, you may catch glimpses of several of Bhutan's snow-capped peaks, including the majestic Gangkar Puensum, the world's highest unclimbed mountain.

A must-stop along the way is the Royal Botanical Park at Lamperi, located just before the pass. The park spans over 47 square kilometers and is rich in biodiversity. It's a great place for a short nature walk on well-marked trails that pass through oak, rhododendron, and bamboo forests. Interpretive signs help visitors learn about the local flora and fauna, and the tranquil setting is ideal for a peaceful break. Continuing the descent, the landscape transitions from cool alpine to lush subtropical valleys as you approach Punakha, with terraced rice fields, traditional farmhouses, and the sparkling Mo Chhu River welcoming you into the valley.

### **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 of the traditional fortress, learn about its historical importance, and perhaps see Assam macaques climbing the walls. If open, you'll also visit the Tower of Trongsa Museum. The watchtower, up on the hill, has great views and interesting cultural and historical artifacts. The district is also an ideal place to find golden langurs; an increasingly endangered primate found only in Bhutan and parts of India. The drive from Punakha to Trongsa in November is a breathtaking journey through some of Bhutan's most dramatic landscapes, steeped in natural beauty and cultural significance. Covering around 130 kilometers and taking roughly 5 to 6 hours, the road winds through lush valleys, dense forests, and high mountain passes, offering a rich and varied experience.

As the road descends from Pele La, it enters the broad, forested valley of Trongsa, Bhutan's geographic heart. The first sight of the Trongsa Dzong—dramatically perched on a ridge high above the Mangde Chhu River—is one of the most iconic views in Bhutan. The dzong appears suddenly through the trees, commanding the landscape and offering a powerful visual introduction to the region's history.

At Trongsa you'll visit the Trongsa Dzong and the watch-tower museum, which is dedicated to the Royal Family of Bhutan.



Landscape  
© Namgay Tshering

### Tingtibe

During your time in Tingtibe, you may encounter an exceptional variety of wildlife, including sought-after bird species such as Fire-tailed Myzornis, Cutia, Sultan Tit, Yellow-cheeked Tit, several species of Fulvettas and Laughingthrushes, Golden Babbler, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Red-headed Trogan, Beautiful Nuthatch, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Pin-tailed Pigeon, and both White-browed and Speckled Piculet, among many others. Keep an eye out for the endemic and rare golden langur, a flagship species of the region, as well as the black giant squirrel and yellow-throated marten, while exploring the mixed broadleaved evergreen forests that span elevations from 2,000 to 8,000 ft.

Renowned as a birding hotspot, Tingtibe offers remarkable wildlife encounters in a truly remote setting. Accommodations here are very basic, but the richness of the wildlife and the authenticity of the experience more than compensate for the simplicity.

One full day is dedicated to birding in the Tingtibe region with a special focus on seeking one of the rarest birds on Earth, the White-bellied Heron. With an estimated global population of fewer than 60 individuals, and nearly half found in Bhutan, encountering this critically endangered species is a truly extraordinary privilege. Other species you may encounter include White-hooded Babbler, Rufous-necked Hornbill, and White-breasted Parrotbill.



Yellow-cheeked Tit  
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

### Panbang

The drive from Tingtibe to Panbang in southern Bhutan is a journey through one of the country's richest biodiversity corridors, offering exceptional birdwatching and immersion in lush subtropical forests. Spanning approximately 96 kilometers and taking about 3 to 4 hours, this route descends from the mid-hills of Zhemgang into the lowland forests bordering the Royal Manas National Park, Bhutan's oldest national park and a UNESCO tentative site. The park encompasses a mosaic of habitats, including tropical and subtropical broadleaf forests, riverine grasslands, and bamboo groves. These diverse ecosystems support a wide array of flora and fauna, making the area a hotspot for biodiversity. Beyond birds, the area is rich in other wildlife. The Panbang valley is known for its vast variety of butterflies and moths, with numerous species recorded in the region.

Mammals such as the golden langur, an endangered primate endemic to Bhutan, can also be spotted in the forests along the route.



Rufous-necked Hornbill  
© Namgay Tshering

### Nganglam

The drive from Panbang to Nganglam in southeastern Bhutan is a remarkable journey through some of

the country's most biodiverse and bird-rich subtropical forests. Spanning approximately 80 kilometers, this route descends to elevations as low as 1,312 ft, offering birders and nature enthusiasts an exceptional opportunity to observe a wide array of tropical and subtropical species.

This corridor traverses the fringes of Royal Manas National Park, Bhutan's oldest protected area. The landscape is characterized by dense broadleaf forests, bamboo thickets, and riverine ecosystems. These habitats support a rich diversity of flora and fauna, making the region a hotspot for biodiversity.

### **Yongkhola**

The drive to Yongkhola will take you through some of the most pristine high-altitude montane forests along one of the best birding circuits in all of Asia. Keep watch for the beautiful Himalayan Pheasant as you weave through the landscape over Thrumshing La pass at 12,500 ft and down into the Yongkhola at 5,500 ft. If lucky, you might even spot a red panda. Hishey loves birding in this area so much he built Trogon Villa in 2016, so his clients 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. During this time, we will also visit the headquarters of the Mongar district to witness the Mongar Tsechu (festival).

The Mongar Tshechu is a vibrant three-day religious and cultural festival held annually in eastern Bhutan, from November 17 to 19. Hosted in the courtyard of Mongar Dzong, this event is a significant spiritual occasion for the local communities and attracts attendees from neighboring districts such as Trashigang, Lhuentse, and Trashiyangtse.

Central to the Tshechu are the Cham dances, sacred masked performances that depict stories from the life of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) and other Buddhist deities. These dances are believed to confer blessings upon spectators and serve as a means of spiritual purification. Beyond its religious aspects, the festival is a major social event. Locals dress in their finest traditional attire, gather with family and friends, and enjoy communal meals. The Tshechu fosters community bonding and offers a platform for cultural expression through music, dance, and traditional arts.

### **Bumthang ~ Jakar Dzong, Tang Valley**

Bumthang Valley, often considered the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, is a serene and culturally rich region located in the central part of the country. Comprising four smaller valleys—Chokhor, Tang, Ura, and Chume—Bumthang is known for its rolling hills, verdant pastures, and numerous ancient temples and monasteries. It is home to some of Bhutan's most sacred sites, including Jambay Lhakhang and Kurjey Lhakhang, which are deeply rooted in Bhutanese history and the spread of Buddhism in the region. The valley's name, "Bumthang," roughly translates to "beautiful field," a fitting description for its picturesque landscape and peaceful ambiance.

Beyond its spiritual significance, Bumthang offers a unique glimpse into traditional Bhutanese life. The



Festival  
© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

region is renowned for its distinctive textiles, particularly the intricate woolen weaves known as *yathra*, which are produced in villages like Zugney. Visitors can explore quaint farming communities; taste locally made cheese and honey and enjoy scenic hikes through pine forests and along pristine rivers. Despite its growing popularity among tourists, Bumthang has retained its charm and authenticity, making it a captivating destination for those seeking both natural beauty and cultural depth.

### **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 Great Parrotbills are possible sightings here. You may also encounter mammals, like goral and serow, wild herbivores that do well in these habitats around Pela 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 Black-necked Cranes. These cranes typically start to arrive at 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 while flying overhead. During your stay in this valley, you will hike around the crane roost, watch for new arrivals, and visit the Crane Education Center to learn about the various conservation programs in the valley. You will also have the opportunity to enjoy an optional hot stone bath.



Drukgyel Dzong Ruins  
© Debbie Thompson

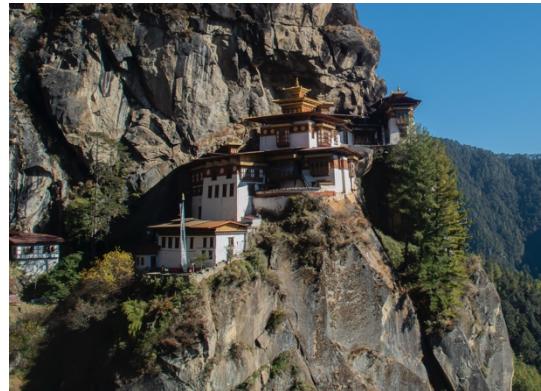
### **Dochu La Pass**

Dochu La, at 10,200 ft, 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.

### **Paro ~ National Museum, Tiger's Nest Monastery, Chele La Pass, Paro Valley**

Make your way back to Paro with time to visit the National Museum of Bhutan. View over 3,000 pieces of the country's finest specimens and masterpieces including art, bronze statues, and paintings that cover 1,500 years of cultural heritage.

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 or magpies in the trees on the trail.



Tiger's Nest Monastery  
© Namgay Tshering

Scenic Chele La Pass is the highest road in Bhutan (close to 13,000 ft) with excellent views when the skies are clear. A pre-dawn departure could uncover nocturnal species such as Gray Nightjars or leopard cats. Explore different habitats as you climb to the mountain pass and search for three different pheasant species. Explore the 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 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.



Festival  
© Namgay Tshering

The Buddhist culture of Bhutan is visible throughout the country with prayer flags and stupas adorning the 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. Due to its strong connection to nature, the country's cultural history is closely tied to its natural history.

### **Nov 26 ~ 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 27 ~ Arrive home**

## COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

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### Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$9,750
Single Supplement	\$600

Costs are per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See *Included* and *Not Included* sections for more details.

If you are a single traveler, we will try to find a roommate for you, but if we cannot pair you with 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
Final	May 27, 2026	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 canceled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferable. No refunds are given after the Final Payment due date.

### Included

- Carbon offsets for the duration of this trip.
- All leaders, transport, park entry fees, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Sustainable Development Fee.
- Transfers in Bhutan.
- Bhutan visa fee.
- Accommodations for the nights of November 6 through November 25.
- Meals from lunch on November 6 through breakfast on November 25.
- Drinking water on the bus and during all included meals.
- Gratuities for lodge/hotel porters and restaurant waitstaff in Bhutan.
- Trip Planning Materials – information about entry requirements, flights, packing, gratuities, etc.

### Not Included

- Carbon offsets for your flights to/from this trip.
- Passport fees

- All airfare, airport and departure taxes, and excess baggage fees. The round-trip flights between Bangkok and Paro will be added to your trip balance based on rates at the time of booking. The estimated cost is \$1,300.
- Accommodations, transportation, and meals in Bangkok.
- Divergent airport transfers (arranged by us) and extra hotel nights in Bangkok.
- Gratuities for assistant guide and driver.
- Optional [emergency evacuation insurance](#) and [trip cancellation 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 Traveler Form.

## **SIGN UP**

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

[Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris](#)

Email: [info@cheesemans.com](mailto:info@cheesemans.com)

WhatsApp: (408) 741-5330

Phone: (800) 527-5330 or (408) 741-5330

## **OTHER DETAILS**

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### **Climate**

The weather in November 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**

You will be at high elevations; your overnights at these elevations range from about 4,500ft at Punakha and Yongkhola to about 9,500ft at Phobjikha. This high elevation makes typically manageable activity a little more difficult. You will need to get in and out of a Toyota Coaster bus and walk from 1 to 2 miles per day at a slow pace along the road with stops to observe and photograph wildlife and Himalayan Mountain scenery. Terrain in Bhutan includes gravel, pavement, dirt paths, uneven ground with inclines, and many stairs. Travelers must be fully mobile and physically independent.

The optional Tiger's Nest Monastery hike (10,300 ft) is the most strenuous activity, covering 6 miles round-trip with 3,000 feet of elevation gain and approximately 1,500 stairs; it requires good balance and mobility, though two rest points provide monastery views without completing the full hike. The roundtrip hike can take about 4 to 6 hours depending on pace, fitness, and how long you stop to rest or take photos. Please contact us if you have any health concerns that may make this trip challenging.

### **Accommodations**

Throughout your journey, you'll stay in lodges and hotels that combine comfort with the charm of Bhutanese architecture. All accommodations have electricity, heat, and private bathrooms with hot showers and flush toilets. Many also provide hair dryers and eco-friendly toiletries, including soap, shampoo, and conditioner in reusable containers, and most rooms have adapters for your devices.

Lodging ranges from deluxe hotels to cozy, remote lodges, each offering its own unique character. In Tingtibe, Panbang, and Nganglam, accommodations are very basic—but still welcoming. Wherever you stay, you'll be surrounded by authentic Bhutanese design, often with beautiful grounds or breathtaking views to enjoy at your leisure.

### **Transportation**

You will drive across Bhutan in Hishey's 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 25mph), and the roads are well kept. Because you look for birds along the roads, you may spend a full day traveling from one destination to another.

### **Flights**

Detailed logistical information is included in the Trip Planning Materials we will send you.

**Please wait to book your flights** until you receive confirmation from your Coordinator that the minimum number of participants has been met to operate the trip. If you choose to book flights before receiving this confirmation, we strongly recommend purchasing flight cancellation insurance to protect your investment.

#### Flights you book

- Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand (BKK) by 11:59pm on November 5 to connect with your early-morning group flight to Bhutan on November 6.
- Depart Bangkok, Thailand (BKK) after 11:59pm on November 26.

#### Flights we book

- The round-trip flights between Bangkok and Paro; we'll add the flight cost to your final trip balance.

### **Terms and Conditions**

Read our current [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](#).
- [Cheesemans' Trips are 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. You can purchase offsets with most airlines (Delta includes them

automatically), use our handy [carbon calculator](#), and donate to Sustainable Travel International, or contribute to your favorite offsetting organization.

## FAQS

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### **Why visit Bhutan?**

Bhutan is a small Himalayan kingdom, the size of Switzerland, renowned for its stunning mountain landscapes, deeply rooted Buddhist culture, and a unique approach to development that prioritizes Gross National Happiness over economic growth. Nestled between India and Tibet, it remains one of the world's most preserved and peaceful countries, with dramatic monasteries perched on cliffs, traditional architecture, and pristine forests covering over 70 percent of its land. Bhutan boasts 20 peaks exceeding 23,000 ft, making it a wonderful place to photograph stunning mountain scenery, while also spotting spectacular birds and charming mammals. Visitors are drawn to Bhutan not just for its natural beauty, but also for the warmth of its people, vibrant festivals, and spiritual atmosphere. With limited tourism and a focus on sustainability, Bhutan offers a rare and authentic travel experience.

### **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 770 bird species inhabit Bhutan, including some of the most exotic and rare species in the Eastern Himalayas. Because of their abundance, birds are the main wildlife you will encounter. Bhutan is also home to at least 170 mammal species, including langurs, macaques, Himalayan black bears, alpine musk deer, yaks, and the endangered takin, which graze on grasses along mountain sides. You may find tiger tracks along the bases of the foothills, up to and above the tree line, although this predator is seldom seen. Red pandas are very rarely seen but are considered good luck if spotted.

### **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 from 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 that continues to serve as Bhutan's administrative and religious center. You'll also see monasteries, including the famous Tiger's Nest, as well as smaller chortens (stupas), all of which are important features of Bhutan's rich religious and cultural heritage. You will have the opportunity 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.

### **What is Gross National Happiness (GNH)?**

GNH is a government index that not only measures the happiness and well-being of the Bhutanese people but also intentionally guides policy. The four pillars of GNH are fair and sustainable socio-economic development,

conservation and promotion of culture, environmental protection (including the constitutionally mandated protection of 60% of the nation as forest land), and good governance.

**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 largely unknown to the world. 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.