



PARO, BHUTAN
PART OF THE COMO GROUP

HIMALAYAN EXPLORER 7 NIGHT ITINERARY



This seven-night package to Bhutan, is the ultimate in comfortable adventure travel, allowing guests, both first-time and repeat, to experience this Himalayan kingdom's inimitable Buddhist culture at a deep and comprehensive level. The exploration comprises two days of guided walks through the Paro Valley, visiting the Taktsang 'Tiger's Nest' Monastery, the National Museum, Drukgyel Dzong and the ancient temple of Kyichu Lhakhang. At each site, guests will be exposed to the subtle intricacies of this ancient Buddhist land, learning about its people, culture and deep-set religious traditions. To further experience Bhutan's staggering Himalayan landscape, guests can choose to spend a day in the capital, Thimphu, or go sightseeing by mountain bike with their own experienced Uma guide through the wild and wooded hinterland. In addition, take a day trip to the remote Haa valley where the Bhutanese continue their rural existences amid the emerald fields and forests where time has stood still for decades.

Returning to our comfortable home in the Himalaya, Uma Paro, after each day's adventures - accommodation is included on a full-board basis, excluding beverages - there is plenty of free time to relax, enjoying the peace, views, swimming pool and a COMO Shambhala massage per person.

DAY 1

Arrival, check-in, show round & easy walk Uma Paro staff will welcome you at the airport for the 10 minute transfer to the property. We invite you for a short, guided walk in the afternoon in and around Uma Paro for orientation and acclimatisation purposes.

DAY 2

Daywalk Zurig Dzong, Rinpung Dzong, Ta Dzong, Paro Town & Kyichu Lhakhang Wind through pine forests high above Uma Paro to the pretty grounds of the fortress-like monastery of Zuri Dzong. Traverse across to Ta Dzong, housing Bhutan's National Museum (open Tuesday-Saturday) with magnificent views over Paro, and on down to visit Rinpung Dzong - 'Fortress on a Heap of Jewels'. The trail then leads across Paro Chhu (river) via a traditional covered bridge (Nyamai Zam) and then past the main archery ground, Ugyen Pelri Palace and into Paro town. A few kilometers north of Paro, we pay our respects at Kyichu Lhakhang one of the oldest temples in Bhutan with its magic orange tree which bears fruit all year round.

Duration: 5 - 7 hours (depending on time spent in National Museum and Paro)

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Guided with picnic

DAY 3

A Day Out in the Haa Valley Day (optional bike descents) Start early for the drive to Haa via Chele La (pass) which at 3810m is the highest road pass in Bhutan, snaking upwards through blue pine and rhododendron (Etho Metho) forests for 35km. On a clear day the view sweeps away to snow-dome of Bhutan's highest peak Mt Jhomolhari (7314m). After a bracing walk along the prayer flag bedecked ridge it is down into Haa (by bike if you prefer) – the whole drive should take no more than 2.5 hours. Wangchulo Dzong is presently occupied by the Indian Army, however this makes for a quirky experience. Having visited the bazaar it is a short walk (or bike ride) along the Haa Chhu (river) to a picnic spot. At Lhakhang Karpo (the White Temple), many young monks await to offer a warm, noisy welcome and may accompany us to the nearby Lhakhang Nagpo (the Black Temple). The Haa valley only opened to foreigners in 2002 due to its proximity to the border with Sikkim and Tibet. This unspoilt valley harks back to a simpler more traditional time. For those who would rather a walk than to visit Haa we recommend a 3-4 hour hike up to Kili Goemba an ancient nunnery, topping out at Chele La. A further option, once back (by vehicle or bike) in the Paro Valley, time permitting, is a 20 minute walk out to the dramatically positioned Dzongdrakha Goemba complex.

Duration: 7 – 9 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Guided with picnic, KONA Cinder Cone mountain bike, helmet, gloves

DAY 4

Chhubjakhar Monastery Walk Ascend from Uma Paro through blue pine forest to a viewpoint amongst prayer flags on ridge. The path continues up the ridge then traverses to Gemjo La Goemba (monastery) high above Uma. Hopefully one or both of our old friends Mindu and Passang will be there to meet us. A wide plateau flanked by orchards and forest is reached after a short climb from the monastery. Linger here awhile soaking up the magnificent mountain views and exploring the ruined fortress, deserted farmhouses and nearby Chhubjakhar monastery. There is now the option to either head off on a longer walk for further exploration or turn back for Uma Paro.

Duration: 5 - 7 hours depending on which option is taken

Difficulty: Moderate

Guided with picnic

DAY 5

Day Out in Thimpu or Mountain Biking

Option 1 Thimpu The capital of Bhutan sprawls up the wooded western hillside of the Wang Chhu. The centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimpu is a bustling town where traditional ways mingle with modern introductions. The drive from Uma Paro to the capital takes about 1.5 hours and sights worth seeing include the following, time and local conditions permitting:

Market Days: Thimpu's main markets days are Friday, Saturday and Sunday and your itinerary may be adjusted to include one of these market days if you wish.

BBS Tower Viewpoint and Takin Compound: On the way to the viewpoint over Thimpu is the home of Bhutan's national animal, the Takin, a strange looking beast which some say looks like a beestung moose.

National Memorial Chorten: Bhutan's third king, H.M. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck who had wished to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity, died before his plan came to fruition. However, the Royal Family and Cabinet resolved to fulfil his wishes and erect a memorial that would perpetuate his memory and also serve as a monument to peace.

View of Trashi Chhoe Dzong: the "fortress of the glorious religion", was initially erected in 1641 and rebuilt by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck in the 1960s. Tashi Chhoe Dzong houses some ministries, His Majesty's secretariat, and the central monk body. Entrance may be granted to guests only after 5pm but the nine hole golf course alongside makes for a quirky photo opportunity.

National Institute of Traditional Medicine: Still dispensing traditional herbal and other medicines, made from plants, minerals, animal parts, precious metals and gems. A working facility for research and the treatment of local people the tour is fascinating (Open Monday to Friday).

National Textile Museum: Providing an insight into the living national art of weaving this museum exhibits fine examples of all the major weaving techniques and the changing styles of gho and kira over the years, with weavers demonstrating their skills on traditional back looms (Open Tuesday-Friday and half day at the weekends).

Folk Heritage Museum: If there is still time we may visit this replica of a traditional Bhutanese house as it would have looked 100 years ago and as many Bhutanese families still live to this day (Open Monday to Friday)

Please note museum, monastery, temple and dzong opening days and times can and do vary with national holidays and events such a visit by a member of the Royal Family or auspicious ceremonies

Duration: 7 – 10 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Guided with picnic or sample typical Bhutanese fare at own expense in local restaurant

Option 2 Mountain Biking Paro Valley and the Do Chhu Trail Riding out from Uma Paro descend to Paro Town then turn north past Dungste Lhakhang (a chorten-like temple built in 1433 by Thangtong Gyalpo) up the Do Chhu Valley past archery grounds, large prayer wheels and houses, heading for Aotsho Lhakhang (temple). From here leave the graded track and head upwards on a logging trail reaching the trailhead deep in the forest after a challenging ride. Returning to Aotsho we make our way through the village and onto another track for a fun descent back to Paro. From here we can either head home or up the Paro valley towards Kyichu Lhakhang on road before returning to Uma Paro on a track where the last steep ascent awaits our tired legs.

Duration: 5 - 8 hours

Difficulty: Moderate to Hard (depending on guests' preference)

Guided with picnic, KONA Cinder Cone mountain bike, helmet, gloves

DAY 6

Free For relaxing around Uma Paro enjoying the facilities or perhaps trying some other activity like the Bhutanese national sport of archery or maybe a therapy such as the traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath.

DAY 7

Highlights of the Paro Valley - Taktsang Walk & Drukgyel Dzong One of the most amazing and important pieces of architecture in Bhutan, Taktsang Goemba defies logic, gravity, and reason. Legend has it that this cliffside was where Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) landed on the back of a flying tigress, bringing Buddhism to Bhutan from Tibet.

To avoid the hot sun an early start is advisable for the two-hour climb, via the cafeteria, to the Tiger's Nest viewpoint. Descend steeply, then climb up to the monastery, passing a waterfall (visit monastery if it is open – with sufficient notice Uma Paro can arrange a permit). We retrace our steps or alternatively (time permitting) head further up to several remote temples and monasteries. Drive further up the valley to Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1644 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to control northern route to Tibet. The route is picturesque, and the site of dzong magnificent (from here, only two-day hike to the border with Tibet, dominated by Mt Jhomalhari).

Duration: 7 – 8 hours

Difficulty: Moderate to Hard (ascent should not be attempted until at least third day in Bhutan, after acclimatization has occurred, riding ponies are available at an additional charge)

Guided with picnic

DAY 8

Depart Druk Air departs in the early morning to avoid adverse weather conditions so after breakfast, your transfer to the airport will be arranged for between 5am and 9am depending on the flight schedule and your destination.

INCLUSIONS

- Accommodation on a full-board basis (excluding beverages)
- Three privately guided one day walks with picnic lunch taking in the highlights of the Paro Valley, including Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery, the National Museum, Drukgyel Dzong, traditional villages and a visit to the temple of Kyichu Lhakhang
- A morning Puja (pilgrimage) to a local monastery
- A day out in the remote Haa Valley and a visit to a local house
- A day out in Thimpu or a day's mountain biking
- The services of an experienced English-speaking Bhutanese Uma Paro Guide
- One free day
- One COMO Shambhala massage per person
- Private airport transfers and transport in Bhutan
- Inclusive of 10% service charge and 10% sales tax
- All Bhutanese Government Visa Fees and Royalties
- Complimentary scheduled 1 hour daily yoga class whilst at Uma Paro (except Sundays)
- Complimentary use of the swimming pool, library, steam room and gym at Uma Paro

Uma Paro provides complimentary drinking water for all guided itineraries. If you have any special dietary requests, please let us know in advance. Where stated, trips include lunchtime picnics prepared by Uma Paro's chefs. Please place your picnic order the day before departure via your Guide or the Activity Desk on extension 3308.

Throughout your stay you have the option to participate in a range of extra Outdoor Activities at an additional charge.

Travel to Bhutan Uma Paro handles the whole booking process on behalf of our guests, including Druk Air flights (not included in the package) and visa applications (included in the package) but it is advisable to book well in advance to secure accommodation and seats on Bhutan's national airline - Druk Air.

Please read this document in conjunction with your confirmation letter and pre-departure information.

For more information on Uma Paro, including the full range of itineraries and services (including tailor-made itineraries, groups and the hosting of special events) we offer, please refer to the website www.uma.como.bz or email info.paro@uma.como.bz