Bhutan
IS THIS THE LAST SHANGRI-LA?
October 31 – November 10, 2023
This tour is presented by the alumni associations of the University of Alberta, the University of Saskatchewan, Western University, and McGill University. All are welcome!

A trip to Bhutan feels like the perfect antidote to the last few years of uncertainty and stress.

Blissfully apart from the outside world, and notably untrammeled by travelers, Bhutan remains true to itself – its rivers and mountains pure and magical; its people gracious and welcoming; its culture rich and enlivening; and its spirituality prevalent and inspiring.

Spirituality and the strong rooted Bhutanese culture can be found in almost everything the Bhutanese people do on a daily basis, including how they eat, how they work, and how they relate with the natural environment. This tour is rich with people experiences; you’ll have exclusive access to nation builders, chefs, artists, and spiritual leaders.

Bhutan has committed to being the first nation in the world to go 100% organic. We’ll enjoy meals at restaurants and farm homes serving locally sourced organic farm produce, making every meal a fresh and healthy one.

Accommodations include western style hotels with traditional architecture and textiles, a monastery stay, and a night of glamping in the extraordinary Bumthang Valley.

You will savour this nature, culture, and adventure for a lifetime, uncovering paths known only to the locals; taking tea with monks at their monasteries; and venturing away from the cities to meadows filled with wildflowers, ancient hamlets, forests of blue pine, spruce and rhododendron, and terraced paddy fields and orchards.

**Tour Leader**

Paula Swart is a museum curator and expert on Asian culture and history. Paula has degrees in Sinology, Asian art history, Chinese history, and archaeology and has published several books and numerous articles on the art and architecture of Asian cultures. Paula has been introducing travellers to Bhutan, its history and culture, for more than 20 years.
Signature Moments

- Hike to Tiger’s Nest Monastery
- Savour farm to table cuisine
- Spin the prayer wheels
- Explore Paro with an acclaimed Bhutanese architect
- Visit ancient monasteries

Our Route

[Map of Bhutan, India, and Tibet with locations marked: Paro, Punakha, Thimpu, Bumthang, Gangtey, and an outline of India and Tibet. The map shows the routes of the trip.]
Detailed Itinerary

Tuesday, Oct. 31: Arrive Paro, drive to Thimpu
Arrive at Paro where our local representative will meet you and accompany you to a traditional farmhouse for a blessing and spiritual cleansing ceremony in the altar room. Enjoy a meal, then continue to Thimpu (about one hour). We’ll conclude the day with dinner and conversation with an expert on the country’s policy of Gross National Happiness to set the tone for our in-depth exploration of the country.
Overnight: Zhiwaling Ascent, Thimpu
Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Wednesday, Nov. 1: Thimpu
Start the day at the Takin Preserve to view Bhutan’s national animal, an unusual goat-antelope with special religious status. Visit the most significant public and private art galleries in the company of a local artist and learn about the importance of textiles within the Bhutanese tradition. Attend Evening Prayer at the Thangthong Dewachen Nunnery.
Overnight: Zhiwaling Ascent, Thimpu
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Thursday, Nov 2: Fly to Bumthang
A short morning flight takes us east to Bumthang, the religious heartland of the nation and home to some of its oldest Buddhist temples and monasteries. Visit the ancient Jambey Lhakhang temple, one of a chain of 108 simultaneously constructed temples built to subdue an evil demoness that lay over the Himalayas. Take a walk around the lovely little town and marvel at the views of the Choekor Valley from the courtyard of the Jakar Dzong.
Overnight: Zhiwaling Ascent, Thimpu
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Friday, Nov. 3: Monasteries of Bumthang
This morning we have a very special visit with a monk who will accompany us to visit the sacred relics of his monastery and provide a fascinating insight into Buddhism and its practice. Visit a weaving center to admire the thick handwoven ‘yathra’ textile decorated with intricate designs.
Overnight: Rinchenling Lodge, Bumthang
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Saturday, Nov. 4: To Gangtey
Depart Bumthang by road heading to Gangtey, five hours away, through a landscape of forested valleys and gentle hills capped with whitewashed monasteries. Visit the pretty village of Trongsa to see see the famous Trongsa Dzong perched over the village and the Royal Heritage Museum.
Overnight: Dewachen Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Sunday, Nov. 5: Phobjika Valley
Today we enjoy one of the most beautiful walks in Bhutan. Starting from just below the renowned Gangtey Goemba Monastery, the walk takes us through a picturesque village, through a forest of conifers, and then to the vast plains of the Gangtey Valley and along gentle grassy slopes carpeted with purple primulas. Enjoy a picnic lunch at Kheyang Monastery, one of the oldest in the valley with three impressive two-storey statues of the past, present, and future Buddhas. Visit the information centre of the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature to observe Karma and Pema, injured black-necked cranes who live in an enclosure at the centre. We’re guests this evening at a farm home for a traditional family meal.
Overnight: Dewachen Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Bhutan has committed to being the first nation in the world to go 100% organic.
Monday, Nov. 6: To Punakha
This morning’s 2.5 hours drive westward takes through the pine forests of the beautiful Phobjikha Valley to Punakha. We’re guests this at the ancestral home of one of Bhutan’s premier textile artists who will share the traditional natural dyeing process of textiles and prepare a homemade lunch for us.
Overnight: Zhingkham Resort, Punakha
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tuesday, Nov. 7: Punakha
Visit the Punakha Dzong, the most beautiful dzong in the country, to admire the special features of Bhutanese architecture and how these are preserved today. Walk across the suspension bridge and through the rice paddies to the village of Yebisa with splendid views of the valley.
Overnight: Zhingkham Resort, Punakha
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Wednesday, Nov. 8: To Paro
Continue westward towards Paro, stopping for lunch at a lovely forest farm where we learn to prepare some traditional Bhutanese dishes. Arrived in Paro, explore the impressive Rinpung Dzong and visit the National Museum, a magnificent collection of Bhutanese artefacts including costumes, religious paintings, textiles, and stamps.
Overnight: Tashi Namgay Resort, Paro
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Thursday, Nov. 9: Paro, Tiger’s Nest Monastery
This morning we embark on the amazing hike to the Tiger’s Nest, the sacred Paro Taktsang Monastery which clings impossibly to the rock face 900m above the valley floor. This is the birthplace of Buddhism in Bhutan. We’ll enjoy a mountainside picnic lunch with spectacular views. This evening we enjoy a traditional hot stone bath followed by dinner at a welcoming farm home.
Overnight: Tashi Namgay Resort, Paro
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Friday, Nov. 10: Depart Paro
Bid Bhutan farewell this morning, taking it with you in your soul.
Meals: Breakfast

Note: The itinerary and accommodation described in this tour brochure are subject to change due to logistical arrangements and to take advantage of local events.
What’s Included:
• Airport transfers for passengers arriving and departing as per the group itinerary
• Accommodation based on double occupancy in hotels listed or similar
• Transportation by comfortable vehicle
• Flight from Thimpu to Bumthang
• Meals as described in the itinerary: 10 Breakfasts, 10 Lunches, 10 Dinners
• Sightseeing with qualified English-speaking guides
• All activities as described in the itinerary
• All entrance fees
• Private meditation sessions
• Exclusive presentations by Bhutanese experts
• Fully escorted by our Bhutanese Tour Director

Not Included:
• Airfare from your home to join the tour
• Meals other than those described
• Alcoholic beverages
• Travel insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Additional arrangements required due to any emergency or other situation

Payment Details:
A non-refundable deposit of US$500 per person is required to reserve a space on this tour. A second payment of US$1000 per person is due six months prior to departure. Final payment is due 90 days prior to departure.
What to Expect

Joining Instructions
Please note that flights to Bhutan for this program are via Bangkok. Guests will arrive in Bangkok on October 30 and depart Bangkok on Nov. 11

Bangkok pre- and post-tour package:
Cost (per person): Approx US$1750
Single supplement: US$250

What’s Included:
- Accommodation in Bangkok on October 30 and November 10, based on double occupancy
- Dinner on October 30
- Breakfast on October 31 and November 11
- Roundtrip flight Bangkok/Paro/Bangkok (price subject to change)

Level of Activity: Moderate
This tour involves walking on uneven terrain. Please note that we will be at altitudes of 3400 metres at the highest point and average elevations of about 2500 metres. All hikes and walks are optional. Should you have any questions about your ability to take part in this tour, please give us a call.

Weather
We expect clear, sunny skies with daytime temperatures around 15°C (60°F) and overnight lows of around 0°C (32°F).

Transportation
We will use a comfortable 20-seater coach. There are some long drives over narrow and mountainous roads. This itinerary includes one internal flight (Thimpu to Bumthang).

Travel Documents
You will require a passport for your trip to Bhutan. Please ensure it is valid for six months beyond your scheduled return date. Before booking, please refer to the Canadian government website to obtain travel advice for the destination(s) you are visiting: www.travel.gc.ca

Accommodation
We’ve selected accommodation that prioritize the beautiful views and tranquility of Bhutan. All rooms have private bathrooms.

Zhiwaling Ascent, Thimpu is a modern hotel set in a beautiful location above the valley, surrounded by swathes of evergreen cypress trees valued for their medicinal essential oils. The hotel is staffed by graduates of the nearby Hospitality School, a positive initiative supporting Bhutanese education. The restaurant is known for delicious cuisine serving organic vegetables from the kitchen garden.

Rincheling Lodge, Bumthang is a lovely family-owned guesthouse set in a pine forest, a five-minute walk from one of the Kingdom’s most sacred sites, the Jampa Lhakhang. Rooms have pine wood interiors and traditional décor. Enjoy the herbal stone bath or a customized massage.

Dewachen Hotel, Gangtay is encircled by pine forests and boasts fantastic valley views and a hot stone bath. Rooms have beautiful wooden interiors heated by an iron stove and hot water bottles in the bed, as needed.

Zhingkham Resort, Punakha has breathtaking views over the Punakha Valley that add to the tranquil feeling of this traditional hotel. Spa services include a variety of holistic practices.

Tashi Namgay Resort, Paro is set in a tranquil five acres of lush foliage, the hotel is a blend of traditional and modern elements. Rooms are elegantly decorated and well-equipped. Facilities include a gym, sauna, and spa.

COVID-19 Entry and Travel Requirements
All travellers on Worldwide Quest tours are required to be fully vaccinated and prepared to show proof of vaccination as per local regulations. Please refer to these websites for current requirements:
Bhutan: https://www.doi.gov.bt/
Canada: https://travel.gc.ca/

#SafeTravels
Worldwide Quest has been awarded the World Travel and Tourism Council’s #SafeTravels Stamp for adopting health and hygiene global standardized protocols. Learn more.
Additional Info

Extend your Stay
If you are interested in exploring more of this region, we would be happy to design a personalized extension for you either before or after this tour. Please let us suggest some options, based on your time available, budget and interests.

Terms and Conditions
For additional information about our terms and conditions, please refer to your booking form, the current brochure or our website. All participants booking with Worldwide Quest are covered by the terms of the Ontario Travel Industry Act (Worldwide Quest International, Ontario - License # 2667946). See full details here.

Cancellation Policy
All payments are non-refundable, however you may transfer your initial deposit for any land tour to another tour 90 days or more prior to your scheduled departure date. Initial deposits for cruises are non-refundable and non-transferable. Your second payment and your final payment are non-refundable and non-transferable. If you cancel within 90 days prior to trip departure, all associated trip costs are non-refundable. In the event of a cancellation, you must notify Worldwide Quest immediately and in writing. See full details here.

Travel Insurance
We urge you to ensure that you have adequate cancellation and medical insurance in place, should an unexpected event cause you to cancel or interrupt your trip or should the tour not be operable per our terms and conditions. We will offer you Manulife insurance coverage. Medical insurance including emergency medical evacuation coverage is mandatory on all our tours.

How to Book
Please contact the Worldwide Quest office for more information and to secure your booking.
1-800-387-1483 | 416-633-5666
travel@worldwidequest.com