

Fortress Dzongs by Day, a Cliffside Monastery at Dawn — A 6-Day Bhutan Itinerary

Bhutan in six days: Thimphu's giant hillside Buddha, fortress dzongs and an afternoon archery ground, the river-valley capital of Punakha with its 17th-century dzong and one of the country's longest suspension bridges, a farmhouse lunch and a traditional hot stone bath, and the dawn hike to the cliffside Tiger's Nest monastery above Paro — with a licensed local guide, real hotels, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION

6 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

March – May & September – November

spring brings rhododendron blooms and clear Himalayan views, while autumn has the driest skies and coolest temperatures (50–70°F / 10–21°C); avoid the summer monsoon (June–August) and the coldest weeks of winter (Dec–Feb), when high passes can see snow

FROM

\$1,750 USD / person

for 2 people, incl. Sustainable Development Fee, guide, driver, hotels & most meals

Day
1

Arrive in Paro, Transfer to Thimphu

Land at Paro International Airport — one of the most dramatic runway approaches in the world, banking between Himalayan ridgelines — and meet a private guide and driver for the drive to the capital, with the afternoon built around Bhutan's largest sitting Buddha.

Private Airport Transfer & Guide — Ambo Tours

~1.5 hours · From \$120 USD, private car & English-speaking guide for 2

A licensed Bhutanese tour operator meets every arrival at Paro International Airport — all foreign visitors travel with a guide and driver arranged in advance — for the scenic drive east to Thimphu along the Paro Chhu and Wang Chhu river valleys.

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Buddha Dordenma

~1 hour, self-guided · Free (small donation box)

A 169-foot bronze Buddha statue gilded in gold, seated on a hilltop above Thimphu and visible from most of the valley — inside its base sit 125,000 smaller Buddha statues, and the terrace looks out over the entire capital at dusk.

Dinner — Folk Heritage Museum Restaurant

~1.5 hours · \$25–\$35 USD / person

A traditional farmhouse-style restaurant beside Thimphu's Folk Heritage Museum, serving ema datshi (chili cheese stew), red rice and butter tea on low wooden tables — a gentle introduction to Bhutanese cooking on the first night.

Overnight — Le Méridien Thimphu

From \$320–\$420 USD / night, for 2 people

A modern high-rise hotel in the heart of the capital, with mountain views, an indoor pool and easy walking distance to Thimphu's main clock tower square.

Le Méridien Thimphu · +975 2 337 8088 · marriott.com/pbhmd-le-meridien-thimphu

Day
2

Thimphu — Dzongs, Archery & Handicrafts

A full day around the capital, from the fortress-monastery that houses Bhutan's government and central monk body to the open ground where the national sport draws a crowd most afternoons.

Tashichho Dzong

~1 hour, self-guided (open to visitors after 5pm on weekdays) · Free

A whitewashed fortress-monastery on the Wang Chhu river, seat of Bhutan's civil government and summer residence of the Je Khenpo (chief abbot) — its golden roofs and courtyards are built entirely in traditional style without a single nail.

Archery at the Changlimithang Grounds

~1 hour, self-guided · Free to watch

Bhutan's national sport draws teams most weekend and holiday afternoons to the country's largest archery ground, where archers shoot at targets nearly 500 feet away accompanied by singing and dancing from supporters between rounds.

Handicrafts on Norzin Lam

~1 hour, self-guided · Free to browse

Stalls and small shops along Thimphu's main street selling hand-woven textiles, prayer wheels, wooden masks and silver jewellery — a good stop for gifts before heading into the countryside.

Overnight — Le Méridien Thimphu

From \$320–\$420 USD / night, for 2 people

Second night in the capital before tomorrow's drive over Dochula Pass.

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Day
3

Thimphu to Punakha via Dochula Pass

East over the 10,000-foot Dochula Pass and down into the subtropical Punakha valley, ending at the fortress where Bhutan's kings are still crowned.

Private Transfer — Ambo Tours, Thimphu to Punakha

~3 hours · From \$140 USD, private car & guide for 2

The drive climbs to Dochula Pass, its 108 memorial chortens strung with prayer flags against a wall of Himalayan peaks on clear mornings, before descending nearly 5,000 feet into Punakha's rice terraces and river valleys.

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Punakha Dzong

Punakha Suspension Bridge

~30 minutes, self-guided · Free

At around 520 feet, one of the longest suspension bridges in Bhutan, strung with thousands of prayer flags and swaying gently over the Po Chhu river between Punakha Dzong and the village of Samdingkha.

Mo Chhu River Rafting

~1.5 hours, guided · From \$50 USD / person

A gentle Class II float down the glacier-fed Mo Chhu past Punakha Dzong and riverside farmland, run with life jackets and a safety kayak — calm enough for first-time rafters.

Farmhouse Lunch

~1.5 hours · \$25–\$35 USD / person, arranged through Ambo Tours

Lunch with a local family in a traditional rammed-earth farmhouse in the Punakha valley, with a spread of red rice, ema datshi and seasonal vegetables served in the family's altar room.

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Overnight — Dhensa Resort

From \$420–\$520 USD / night, for 2 people

Second night at the resort before tomorrow's drive back over the pass to Paro.

Dhensa Resort · +975 2 584 434 · dhensa.com

Day
5

Punakha to Paro

Back across Dochula Pass and into the Paro valley, with the afternoon spent among the region's oldest dzong and museum before a traditional bath to soak out the week's driving.

Private Transfer — Ambo Tours, Punakha to Paro

~4 hours · From \$150 USD, private car & guide for 2

The return drive recrosses Dochula Pass before continuing west to the Paro valley, Bhutan's most fertile rice-growing region and home to the country's only international airport.

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Rinpung Dzong & National Museum

~2 hours, guided · \$5 USD / person (museum)

A 17th-century fortress-monastery overlooking Paro town, still used as a monastic school and district administrative seat, paired with the circular National Museum in the old watchtower above it, home to Bhutanese thangka paintings, armor and stamps.

Traditional Hot Stone Bath

~1 hour · \$70–\$90 USD / person

River-smoothed stones are heated over an open fire until glowing, then dropped into a wooden tub of water infused with local herbs — a Bhutanese tradition believed to ease sore muscles, arranged at the hotel spa.

Overnight — Zhiwa Ling Heritage

From \$720–\$900 USD / night, for 2 people

A handcrafted timber hotel built by Bhutanese artisans using traditional joinery techniques, set among pine forest at the base of the Paro valley within walking distance of the Tiger's Nest trailhead.

Zhiwa Ling Heritage · +975 8 271 277 · zhiwalingheritage.com

Day
6

Tiger's Nest Hike & Departure

The trip's signature day: a morning climb to Bhutan's most iconic monastery, before the drive to the airport for departure.

Tiger's Nest Hike — Taktsang Monastery

~5 hours round-trip, guided (steep, ~2,000 ft elevation gain) · Included with tour guide

A steep climb through blue pine forest to a monastery complex built into a sheer cliff face 3,000 feet above the Paro valley floor, where Guru Rinpoche is said to have meditated in a cave in the 8th century after arriving on the back of a flying tigress — mules are available partway up for those who want them.

Lunch — Taktsang Cafeteria

~1 hour · \$20–\$25 USD / person

A rest-stop cafeteria roughly halfway up the trail with a viewing platform looking straight across the gorge at the monastery — most hikers stop here on the way down for a buffet lunch and a long look back at the cliff.

Departure — Paro International Airport (PBH)

Self-guided

Closes the loop on a week that ran from a giant hillside Buddha to a monastery built into a cliff — check with Drukair or Bhutan Airlines on recommended arrival times, typically 3 hours before an international departure.