

Uma

PARO.BHUTAN
PART OF THE COMO GROUP

BHUTAN THROUGH A LENS Capture the Kingdom with your Camera



SMALL GROUP PHOTOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE - 7 NIGHT FULLBOARD PACKAGE (5 nights Uma Paro, 2 nights Uma Punakha)

November 21st to 28th 2009

From bustling markets to mountain passes strewn with prayer flags, from happy monks in maroon robes to massive ancient fortresses – Bhutan is certainly a Shangri La for image-makers. In the month of November the monsoon clouds have vanished, the landscape snapping into sharp focus with crystal light, inky blue skies and fabulous mountain views.

Uma Paro has developed this unique seven-night adventure for photographers of all levels and interests in association with Philip Bowen, a 16-year Bhutan veteran, accomplished photographer and COMO Activity Director who will accompany the group on this exciting itinerary. Our time is divided between Uma's two properties in the distinctly different Paro and Punakha valleys and is a combination of location shoots and serendipitous meetings with friendly locals.

Day 1 Saturday November 21st

Arrival, check-in, show round and first photo opp Uma Paro staff will welcome you at the airport for the 10-minute transfer to the property. After lunch, in order to aid acclimatisation and to get your bearings, we invite you for an introductory photo opportunity with a short, guided local walk. Stroll through bustling Paro Town and out to the massive Rinpung Dzong ('Fortress on a Heap of Jewels'). The trail then leads across Paro Chhu (river) via a traditional covered bridge (Nyamai Zam). This bridge provided the backdrop for scenes in the feature films, *Little Buddha* and *Travellers and Magicians*. This evening please join us for a welcome dinner and photographic adventure briefing with an inspiring slide show.

Duration of walk: 2-3 hour photo walk

Difficulty: EASY

Guided with support vehicle

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 2 Sunday November 22nd

Thimpu, Punakha Valley via Dochu La, Chimmi Lhakhang An early morning start for the 45-minute drive means that on arrival, the capital's weekend market is in full swing. After lunch the drive is truly awe-inspiring as it zigzags up to the 3,140m-high mountain pass of Dochu La with its forests of fluttering prayer flags, maze of memorial chortens and sweeping views of the main Himalayan range. It's then a short walk across rice paddies to Chimmi Lhakhang, a fertility temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley (a Tibetan Buddhist saint known popularly as the 'Divine Madman'). The temple sits atop a picturesque hill surrounded by rice fields; by late afternoon, the light is perfect.

Duration of drive: 3-4 hours (76km)

Overnight : Uma Punakha

**Day 3 Monday November 23rd**

Punakha Dzong, Khamsan Yuley Namgay Chorten Walk, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong and Bazaar This full day allows for further exploration of this scenic valley, low enough (1200m) to allow bananas and oranges to grow. The morning's optional walk up takes us through whitewashed homesteads and farmland to Khamsan Yuley Namgay Chorten, a shrine recently built by the royal family. It is a startlingly ornate and elaborate structure with a rainbow of Guru Rinpoche images and superb views of the Punakha valley. Heading down along the riverside, the massive architectural edifice of the 17th century Punakha Dzong (fortress/monastery) soon looms into view – built in 1637 by Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal in a commanding position at the confluence of the Po Chhu and Mo Chhu ('Father' and 'Mother' rivers). Bhutan's second oldest dzong goes by the full name of Druk Pungthang Decchen Phodrang ('the Palace of Great Happiness') and is arguably the country's most attractive. It served as the seat of the Kingdom's government until the time of the second King and today functions as the winter home of Je Khempo, the head abbot of Bhutan, along with a retinue of 1,000 monks. An afternoon stroll through the quaint bazaar at Wangdue Phodrang to visit its dzong rounds off the day. Founded in 1638 by the Shabdrung, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong is located on a high promontory overlooking the Punak Chhu river.

Duration: 6 - 8 hours

Difficulty: EASY

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Punakha

Day 4 Tuesday November 24th

Punakha Valley to Paro, Chuzom, Tamchog Lhakhang, Traditional Farmhouse Dinner and location shoot Time to retrace our steps back over the Dochu La for a second chance of that wonderful view of the Himalayan range. Returning to the Chuzom (or confluence) we catch a glimpse of the three shrines in Nepali, Tibetan and Bhutanese style that were built to ward off evil spirits near the checkpoint. The journey will be broken with a visit to Tamchog Lhakhang built by Thangtong Gyalpo ('the Iron Bridge Builder'). This former saint from the 14th century introduced the art of building suspension bridges with iron chains; the only way to reach his temple is by one of these photogenic constructions. On the final leg the road snakes alongside the Pa Chhu, through apple orchards and rice paddies, past quaint homesteads to our home in the Himalayas, Uma Paro. After check-in and a show round, we invite you to spend the rest of the day relaxing around the property, enjoying the facilities (Uma has two desktop computers in the library on which to view photos) or perhaps trying some other activity like the Bhutanese national sport of archery. In the early evening we pay our friendly Farmer Tshering a visit at his smallholding for a slap-up Bhutanese dinner; you also get the chance to shoot the farm at rice harvest time.

Duration of drive: 4 - 5 hours

Distance: 120km

Difficulty: EASY

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 5 Wednesday November 25th

Chele La, Kila Goemba and Dzongdrakha, Archery photoshoot

Start early for the drive to Chele La (pass), which at 3810m, is the highest road pass in Bhutan, snaking upwards through blue pine and rhododendron (Etho Metho) forests for 35 kilometres. On a clear day the view sweeps away to the snow-dome of Bhutan's second highest peak Mt Jhomolhari (7314m). This sacred prayer flag-covered pass has appeared in several Bhutanese films plus numerous fashion shoots. Once we have captured our images, we walk down through the forest to Kila Goemba, an ancient nunnery and then further down the mountain we walk out to the Dzongdrakha Goemba complex. Both locations are rarely visited by foreigners. Once we have paid our respects and made some offerings, the photography can begin in earnest. Back at Uma Paro our guides await in their finest traditional costumes ('gho' for men and 'kira' for women) to put on an archery demonstration for our cameras.

Duration of walks: 3 – 4 hours

Trail Conditions: a well-trodden but narrow mountain path

Difficulty: MODERATE

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 6 Thursday November 26th

Kyichu Lhakhang, School Visit, Weavers location shoot, Free A few kilometres north of Paro, we pay our respects at Kyichu Lhakhang. This is one of the oldest temples in Bhutan with its magic orange tree that bears fruit all year round. This ancient temple is connected to the famous Jokhang in Lhasa, Tibet and the comings and goings of the worshippers make for unforgettable images. Nearby, we have arranged a visit to a local school to meet the kids and hand out some disposable cameras for a school project. Afterwards there is the opportunity to shoot at the weavers centre in Paro. The rest of the day is free for more photography or perhaps just to relax around Uma Paro, enjoying the peace and quiet.

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 7 Friday November 27th

Taktsang Walk & Drukgyel Dzong location shoot 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 to the Tiger's Nest viewpoint. Descend steeply, then climb up to the monastery, passing the waterfall (if it is open, we will make a monastery visit, Uma Paro arranging the necessary permits). We then retrace our steps or alternatively (if time and energy levels allow) head further up to several remote temples and monasteries. We drive further up the valley to Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1644 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to control the northern route to Tibet. The route is picturesque, and the site of dzong magnificent.



We have arranged a special photoshoot for the group at this fortress with the local traditional dance group performing masked dances and songs for us in several different costumes. In the evening our group is invited for drinks and a slide show of everyone's favourite images before a firelit farewell dinner either in the courtyard at Uma Paro or at our Bukhari restaurant.

Trail Conditions: Winding rough path which is steep at times

Duration: Taktsang Walk 4 - 6 hours

Difficulty: MODERATE TO HARD

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 8 Saturday November 28th

Depart Fly Paro to Bangkok Druk Air departs in the early morning for the mountain flight.

Package Inclusions

All Bhutanese Government Visa Fees, Taxes and Royalties

Accommodation on a full board basis throughout (excluding beverages)

The services of an experienced European Guide and an English-speaking Bhutanese Uma Paro Guide

Transport including airport transfers

Mineral water on all days out

All entry permits and fees

All arrangements for listed special location shoots and models

Welcome and Farewell Dinners

Complimentary scheduled one-hour daily Yoga class whilst at Uma Paro (except Sundays)

Complimentary use of the swimming pool, library and gym at Uma Paro

In order to take advantage of the FIT surcharge waiver guests must arrive and depart on the scheduled Druk Air flights to and from Bangkok on the 21st and 28th of November. (Any other flights will attract the FIT surcharge (\$30 pppd for two people and \$40 pppd for single travelers)

Maximum Group Size 12 people (minimum 3 people)

The group will be led by one of Uma Paro's highly trained and knowledgeable Bhutanese guides and Philip Bowen throughout. All main luggage is transferred, leaving you with just a daypack with whatever you require for that day's activities. All single travelers benefit from their own room throughout.

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

Please Note: This itinerary is intended as a guide only. Local conditions and weather may necessitate variations to the program and can affect the availability of views and panoramas described. Be aware that all times stated are approximate, and may vary with individual and group fitness or interests.



Visiting Sacred Sites Although we have agreements and permits for the sacred sites we visit, at certain times we may be unable to enter owing to specific ceremonies or rituals underway. When visiting sacred sites like goemba (monasteries) or lhakhang (temples), when passing chortens (Buddhist stone monuments) or mani stone walls (stoned carved with the Buddhist mantra, 'om maani padme hum' which means 'hail to the jewel in the lotus'), always circle clockwise or pass to the left. The same applies when spinning a prayer wheel: rotate the wheel clockwise. The Department of Cultural Affairs advises that men should wear trousers and a shirt with a collar; women should wear a dress or long trousers. Shorts, hats, T-shirts, umbrellas, smoking and alcohol are not allowed. On entering a monastery, do not speak loudly. Remove your shoes. It is also customary to leave a small offering of money on the altar. Having done so, a monk may pour holy water from a sacred vessel (bumpa) into your hand. Make the gesture of sipping this water and then spread the rest on your head. While there are no restrictions on photography outside monasteries, taking photos inside is strictly forbidden. If you wish to take a photograph of a Bhutanese person, please ask first and respect their reply – for the most part the Bhutanese love to meet foreigners and are only too happy to have their picture taken.

Electricity 220 volts AC. A limited supply of transformers is available at Uma Paro for appliances of different voltages, Uma's power points are fitted with multi plugs.

Druk Air Tips for Passengers

Hand Baggage Allowance - Druk Air requests that passengers limit their hand baggage to one piece, the size not exceeding 45+35+20 cm (17 ½ +13 ½ +8 inches) and the weight not exceeding 5 kg (11lbs).

Checked Baggage Allowance - Economy Class: 20 kg (44 lbs) Business Class: 30 kg (66 lbs)

Due to the limited hold space baggage is often left behind, most often from Bangkok. Bulky items should be booked ahead as unaccompanied baggage/cargo.

Customs

Photographers are advised that while stills cameras attract no customs duty, there is a very high levy imposed on video cameras.

For more information about this photographic adventure please email philip.bowen@uma.como.bz

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