



PARO, BHUTAN
PART OF THE COMO GROUP

MOUNTAINS AND MONASTERIES Bhutan by Bike



SMALL GROUP BIKING ADVENTURE - 10 NIGHT FULLBOARD PACKAGE
(4 nights Local Hotels, 6 nights Uma Paro)

July 5th to 15th 2009

If you want to fully engage with the Kingdom of Bhutan, its people, culture and landscapes, then there are few better ways than by bike. Our carefully researched 10 night Himalayan biking adventure comprises cultural road rides, remote off-road trails, huge descents and easy river valley circuits as well as some challenging single track as we explore across 5 distinctly different valleys – using our support vehicles to get us up to each pass before enjoying countless delicious freewheels. Highlights include the first designated mountain biking trail in the Kingdom, a descent from the highest road pass in the country (Chele La 3810m), a roundtrip ride in the magical Phobjikha valley and cultural rides in the Paro, Punakha and Haa valleys. Returning to our comfortable home in the Himalaya, Uma Paro (or carefully selected local hotels on four nights) after each day's adventures - accommodation is included on a full-board basis, excluding beverages – there is also plenty of free time to relax, try the national sport of archery, visit local temples and monasteries or even continue exploring on foot or by bike.

While you don't have to be an Olympic athlete to enjoy this adventure, it is designed for keen cyclists who ride regularly, having said this, on most days the support vehicle is on hand to carry you and your bike if you prefer to take it easy. In addition, two experienced Uma guides will accompany the group, enabling us to cater for different levels of fitness and allowing you to cycle at your own pace.

Come and explore the land of the Thunderdragon with the freedom you only find on two wheels.

Day 1 Sunday July 5th

Arrival – Bike check, briefing and short shake down ride round airport for acclimatization After the awe-inspiring early morning mountain flight from Bangkok Uma Paro staff will welcome you at the airport for the 10 minute transfer to the property. We invite you for a short, guided shakedown ride in the afternoon around the airport for orientation and acclimatization purposes. This evening you are invited to a firelight courtyard welcome dinner and briefing.

Duration: 2-3 hours riding, gently undulating with a final steep ascent/descent to/from Uma Paro

Distance: 10-15km

Trail Conditions: 100% road

Difficulty: EASY

Guided with support vehicle

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 2 Monday July 6th

Paro Valley (2,280m) and Do Chhu Roundtrip - Kyichu, Drukgyel & Rinpung Dzong Today's ride takes in all the main highlights of the Paro valley and heads off the beaten track up a little visited side valley giving another opportunity to stretch legs and acclimatize whilst also sightseeing from the saddle. Sweeping down to the valley floor we follow the Pa Chhu (river) via a traditional covered bridge (Nyamai Zam) and then past the main archery ground, Ugyen Pelri Palace and into Paro town. We head off road at Dob Shari alongside the Do Chhu past several temples and traditional farmhouses climbing very gradually up to the village of Dobshaptoe. Having negotiated the narrow lanes we return to Paro via a higher track rejoining the tarmac to pay our respects at Kyichu Lhakhang one of the oldest temples in Bhutan with its magic orange tree that bears fruit all year round. Continuing up the valley (either by road or on tracks) with Taktsang Goemba (Tiger's Nest Monastery) perched above we wind through villages, rice paddies and pine forest to the roadhead (next stop Tibet) and archery ground at Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1644 by Zabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to control the northern route to Tibet. Now it's time to enjoy a gradual descent virtually all the way back to Paro via Rinpung Dzong – 'Fortress on a Heap of Jewels', before the challenging climb back to Uma Paro (our support vehicle is with us to assist with the last leg if necessary)

Duration: 5-7 hours riding gradual ascents and descents

Distance: 50km

Trail Conditions: 40% road, 60% wide graded tracks, valley riding

Difficulty: EASY to MODERATE

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 3 Tuesday July 7th

Chele La (3810m) and Haa Valley (2670m) Roundtrip 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 the snow-dome of Bhutan's highest peak Mt Jhomolhari (7314m). After a bracing ride along the prayer flag bedecked ridge it is a freewheel all the way down to Wangchulo Dzong which is presently occupied by the Indian Army, however this makes for a quirky experience. Having visited the bazaar it is a short bike ride along the Haa Chhu (river) to a picnic spot. Having climbed to the roadhead we enjoy the freewheel back to Lhakhang Karpo (the White Temple), many young monks await to offer a warm, noisy welcome. 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.

Duration: 5-7 hours riding plus 3-4 driving

Distance: 26km switchback descent, 15km gradual ascent, 15 km gradual descent - total 56km riding

Trail Conditions: 100% road, descent then valley riding

Difficulty: EASY

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Extension Option #1 – 79km to Chuzom (river confluence), return to Uma Paro by vehicle

Extension Option #2 – drive back up Chela La and 35km riding or driving descent to Paro

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 4 Wednesday July 8th

Ugyen Guru Round Trip (max height 2950m) A great day of offroad mountain biking awaits us as we are dropped high up across the valley from Uma and head off on a network of logging trails just below Chele La (from yesterday). Each tough climb through the forest of blue pine is rewarded with a sweeping descent as the trail passes through the odd tiny settlement, fords streams and runs past temples and

chortens before eventually dropping into the town of Bondey. The final leg lies parallel with the airport where that final climb back to Uma awaits.

Duration: 45 minute drive to drop off, 5-6 hours riding

Distance: 25-30km riding

Trail Conditions: 80% off road on logging trails, 20% road, some challenging ascents

Difficulty: MODERATE TO HARD

Guided with picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 5 Thursday July 9th

Paro to Punakha Valley (1250m) Spare a thought for poor people stuck in buses and cars for the whole of their journeys as we spin down the verdant Paro Valley with the raging Pa Chhu to one side all the way to the Chuzom (river confluence) checkpoint. Having taken in the magnificent view of the Himalayan range (weather permitting) we take advantage of a lift all the way up to the Dochhu La (3140m) and then once again escape the confines of our vehicle for a magnificent winding 1000m descent into the low, warm and lush Punakha valley. A short ride across rice paddies takes us to Chimmi Lhakhang, a fertility temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint known popularly as the "Divine Madman." infamous for his colourful and sometimes outrageous adherence to the Buddhist faith. The temple sits atop a picturesque hill surrounded by rice fields. Drukpa Kuenley built a chorten on the site in the 14th century, and it has long been a pilgrimage site for childless couples. Our hotel for the night is not much further but involves a climb if tired legs allow.

Duration: 4-6 hours riding plus 3-4 hours driving

Distance: 18km Uma Paro to Chuzom, 48km drive to Dochu La, 42km descent to Chimmi Lhakhang, 8km to Meri Puensum Hotel - total 68km riding

Trail Conditions: 100% road, gradually down Paro Valley, switchbacks from pass, valley ride Punakha

Difficulty: EASY

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Meri Puensum, Punakha

Day 6 Friday July 10th

Around Punakha Ride Great sightseeing coupled with the first ever, designated mountain biking trail in Bhutan. Riding up the valley, after breakfast, the massive architectural edifice of the 17th century Punakha Dzong (fortress/monastery) soon looms into view. Built in 1637 by Zhabdung 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 serves as the winter home of Je Khempo, the head abbot of Bhutan, along with a retinue of 1,000 monks. After a look around we head out on an exciting single-track trail along the Mo Chhu to Samdingkha and a picnic either here or up at the hot springs beyond. A fast track through rice paddies takes us to a high, wide and wobbly suspension bridge crossing. Hitting the road we pedal as far up the Pa Chhu as we want before turning for home, by road or track.

Duration: 6-7 hours riding

Distance: 5km to bridge, 27km Samdingkha Loop, 12km to Kabesa, 17km to hotel - total 61km riding

Trail Conditions: 60% road, 25% single track, 15% track

Difficulty: MODERATE to HARD

Guided with support vehicle (except for loop) and picnic

Overnight : Meri Puensum, Punakha

Day 7 Saturday July 11th

Punakha to Phobjikha (2900m)

Winding down from our hillside hotel we cross the river and run down to Wangdue Phodrang to visit its dzong and quaint bazaar. With vehicle assistance the long drive to the Lawa La opens up a whole new world as once again in the saddle the trail drops into the dwarf bamboo clad upper Phojikha valley complete with herds of yaks feeding on their favourite food. The 16th century, Gangte goemba sits in a commanding position over this valley and includes a school, meditation facilities and quarters for monks, and is home to the mind reincarnation of Pema Lingpa, one of the region's historically important Buddhist treasure discoverers. With a visit to the monastery complete, we swing along the road down, out into the wide, wild valley and across to our home for the next two nights. The expansive views from the restaurant and rooms of the Dewachen Hotel take the eye across the wetlands sprinkled with tiny goembas and lhakhangs (monasteries and temples) which are just begging to be explored - the lack of

powerlines here will please any keen photographers and birders should not miss a visit to the wildlife viewing hides.

Duration: 3-4 hours riding plus 3-4 hours driving

Distance: Punakha to Wangdue 21km, drive to Small pass Lawa La 62km, descent to Dewachen Hotel 12km – total 33km riding

Trail Conditions: 100% road

Difficulty: EASY

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Dewachen Hotel, Phobjikha

Day 8 July Sunday 12th

Around Phobjikha Ride We set off to explore the exquisite, pristine and lush, glacial Phobjikha Valley. With its alpine setting on the western slope of the Black Mountains, the valley is famous as the seasonal home of the rare black-necked cranes, who spend the winter months here (the cranes can be observed from the last week in October through to mid-February). Our trail today takes us deeper into the wild land (muddy at times) and high up a side valley overlooking sparkling streams, finally reaching the remote temple of Tongchoe and the of village of Yamuchen housing a school and the local Dzongkhag office. Sucking on the thin but purest air we pedal past forests of prayer flags and traditional farmhouses as our route snakes back along the valley side to our base and a well earned dinner.

Duration: 3-4 hours riding

Distance: 22km

Trail Conditions: 100% offroad

Difficulty: MODERATE to HARD

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Dewachen Hotel, Phobjikha



Day 9 July Monday 13th

Dochu La (3140m) Descent to Punakha, Dochhu La challenge, descent to Thimpu valley, return to Uma Paro Sadly the time has come to leave this magical valley behind and having returned to Lawa La, we drop all the way back into Punakha. There is the opportunity to ride the last challenging 10km back over the Dochhu La (another chance to see the view of the Himalayan range) then one more delicious downhill takes us into the Thimpu valley. From the road junction it is 47km back to Uma Paro – your penultimate bike ride in the Land of the Thunderdragon.

Duration: 6-8 hours riding plus 2-3 hours driving

Distance: descent to Punakha 48km, ride last 10km to pass, descent to Thimpu valley 23km - ride back to Uma Paro 47km

Trail Conditions: 100% road

Difficulty:

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 10 Tuesday July 14th

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 (by bike or vehicle) 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 the waterfall (make monastery visit, if open – Uma Paro can arrange necessary permit). Retrace our steps or alternatively (if time and energy levels allow) head further up to several remote temples and monasteries. Drive further up the valley to Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1644 by Zhabdrung 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). Drive or ride home to Uma Paro.

In the evening your group is invited for a fire lit farewell dinner either in the courtyard at Uma Paro or at our Bukhari restaurant.

Duration: 3-4 hours riding plus 3-4 hours walking

Distance: 30km riding

Trail Conditions: 100% road

Difficulty: EASY ride, HARD walk

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

Overnight : Uma Paro

Day 11 Wednesday July 15th

Depart Fly Paro to Bangkok Druk Air departs in the early morning to avoid adverse weather conditions so after breakfast, it is time for your transfer to the airport for the group flight back to Bangkok.

Beyond Uma Paro, we have selected well located, comfortable, somewhat rustic but charming hotels in terms of food and accommodation, for our journey.

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

Support vehicle with comprehensive toolkit and some basic bike spares

Mineral water on all days out

All entry permits and fees

Fire lit courtyard Welcome and Farewell Dinners

Complimentary scheduled 1 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 5th and 15th of July. (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 guide throughout. All main luggage is transferred, leaving you with just a daypack with whatever you require for that day's walk or ride. 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.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How far do I have to ride? Distances range from 10 to 120km/day depending on the day's route.

These may appear short to some and long to others, but bear in mind factors such as the mountainous landscape, altitude and terrain as well as drink, lunch and photo stops; and don't forget that on many trips support vehicles allow riders to take a lift if they find the distances too long or want a more relaxing day.

How should I prepare for my holiday? Any activity that increases stamina is useful, but the best way to prepare for your biking holiday is to go riding. The trip requires basic fitness, preferably acquired

through riding your bike. Even leisurely cycling involves a degree of exertion, so get fit before your departure and you will get the most out of your holiday.

What support will I get? All trips are led by two experienced leaders (one European and one Bhutanese). Leaders generally ride with you, sorting out any mechanical problems or first aid needs, as well as offering insights into the area, tips on riding technique and handling all the trip logistics. On the majority of days, support vehicles accompany riders, carrying tools and spares, refreshments, your luggage - and, if you feel like it, yourself!

I'm worried I'll always be at the back There is always a range of abilities within any group, and cyclists get spread out along the road, so there is always someone at the back. From time to time the leader may need to encourage some people to use the support vehicle so that the day's timetable is not disrupted. There is no substitute for going cycling before your holiday to make sure you are in the best shape possible.

What equipment do I need? Uma Paro has a small fleet of new Kona Cinder Cones (front suspension and disk brakes) available but most keen mountain bikers bring their own bikes with them from home (or at least their own saddle, gloves and helmet) - it is quite easy to fly with a bike, and most airlines do not charge extra (as long as you are within the total baggage allowance). At time of booking, please book your bike size with us as soon as possible.

What clothing do I need? You do not need to be clad in lycra from head to toe to join a cycling group, and in many countries it would not be suitable anyway. Comfortable loose clothing is fine. If you're going to buy one item, make it a good pair of padded shorts or padded underwear, to help you settle on to the saddle. Padded gloves are important as well, and sunglasses with interchangeable lenses help keep dust and insects out of your eyes as well as the sun.

Helmets and safety Cycling of all kinds is potentially dangerous. Helmets and cycling gloves are compulsory safety equipment for biking with Uma Paro. We can lend out cycling helmets and gloves however it will not be possible to guarantee their crash history; we would recommend that you bring your own from home.

For more information about this biking 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**.