

Uma

PARO, BHUTAN
PART OF THE COMO GROUP

CENTRAL & WESTERN BHUTAN JOURNEY & THE BUMDRA MONASTERY CAMP



**SMALL GROUP ADVENTURE - 10 NIGHT FULLBOARD PACKAGE
(3 nights Local Hotels, 6 nights Uma Paro & 1 night Bumdra Camp)**

March 13th to 23rd 2009

This ten-night inclusive adventure in the Dragon Kingdom brings together the very best of Uma Paro's most popular experiences into one itinerary. The Central Bhutan tour coupled with deeper exploration of the hinterland around Uma Paro, offer travelers the opportunity to experience this Himalayan kingdom's inimitable Buddhist culture at a deep and comprehensive level and culminates in an overnight camping trek high above the Tiger's Nest.

The tour beyond Uma Paro (three nights in two locally owned hotels - both clean but basic), journeys deep into the Kingdom's heartland exploring three distinctly different but important valleys - the bustling capital of Thimpu sprawls in its valley dotted with peerless national monuments, museums and markets, the two magnificent dzongs (huge fortress-like monasteries), the unspoilt valley of Haa and the majestic rivers of the almost tropical Punakha/Wangdue valley.

Our local guides at Uma Paro have researched a fabulous two day overnight camping trek which encompasses a night in a magnificently located wilderness campsite high in the Himalaya and whole new way of visiting the inimitable Taktsang Goemba - the Tiger's Nest Monastery. Our pilgrimage describes a circuit using remote mountain paths, where very few foreigners have ever set foot, to eventually approach the Tiger's Nest from our campsite above the clouds near Bumdra Monastery via several other remote and spectacularly perched monasteries and temples. The two day adventure includes two picnic lunches, a camp dinner and breakfast, mineral water, ponies, the services of two experienced local Uma guides and cooks, all tentage, kitbag for packing all personal kit on the ponies, first-aid kit and mattresses for sleeping.

Accompanied by an experienced local guide this combination of spectacular drives, unique nature walks and fascinating temple and monastery visits makes this an unforgettable adventure in the land above the clouds. To get the most from this experience you should be active, reasonably fit and enjoy the great outdoors.

DAY 1 Friday March 13th

Arrival at Paro International Airport, Thimpu Sightseeing your Uma Paro guide will welcome you at the airport for the one hour scenic drive to Thimpu, winding alongside two snaking rivers and passing countless fine examples of the quaint, traditional farmhouse architecture of Bhutan. The capital itself sprawls up the wooded western hillside of the Wang Chhu and is the centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimpu is a bustling town where traditional ways mingle with modern introductions. After check in to our hotel in the heart of the capital, the sightseeing begins and depending on opening hours, guests' interests and time, your guide may include some of the following in your private schedule:

The National Memorial Chorten, Trashi Chhoe Dzong: the "fortress of the glorious religion", the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, the National Textile Museum, the Weekend Market, the Folk Heritage Museum, or you may wish to just go window shopping or perhaps try the one hour walk up to Tango Monastery at the head of the valley

Duration of drive: 1 - 1.5 hours (50km)

Overnight: Jhomalhari Hotel, Thimpu

DAY 2 Saturday March 14th

Thimpu Sightseeing, Punakha Valley via Dochu La, Chimmi Lhakhang the morning provides more opportunities to look around Thimpu before heading off after lunch. This 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, on a clear day, sweeping views of the main Himalayan range. Time to stretch the legs with the short walk across rice paddies to Chimmi Lhakhang, a fertility temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint known popularly as "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.

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

Overnight: Meri Puensum Hotel, Punakha

DAY 3 Sunday March 15th

Punakha Dzong, Khamsan Yuley Namgay Chorten Walk, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong and Bazaar A full day for further exploration of this scenic valley, low enough (1200m) to allow bananas and oranges to grow. The destination for this morning's walk up through whitewashed homesteads and farmland is Khamsan Yuley Namgay Chorten, a shrine recently built by the royal family 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 serves 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.

Overnight: Meri Puensum Hotel, Punakha

DAY 4 Monday March 16th

Punakha Valley to Paro, Chuzom, Tamchog Lhakhang, Free 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 which were built to ward off evil spirits near the checkpoint. Time permitting the journey can be broken with a visit to Tamchog Lhakhang built by Thangtong Gyalpo or the Iron Bridge Builder, as he is known. This former saint from the 14th century introduced the art of building suspension bridges with iron chains and the only way to reach his temple is by one of these bridges. 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 Himalaya, 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 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.

Duration of drive: 4 - 5 hours (120km)

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 5 Tuesday March 17th

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
Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 6 Wednesday March 18th

A Day Out in the Haa Valley Day 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 – 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. Once back (by vehicle or bike) in the Paro Valley, time permitting, a 20 minute walk out to the dramatically positioned Dzongdrakha Goemba complex is recommended.

Duration: 7 – 9 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Guided with picnic, Trek 4500 mountain bike, helmet, gloves

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 7 Thursday March 19th

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

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 8 Friday March 20th

Floating Goddess Day Trek A magical and memorable day begins with a drive up the peaceful Do Chhu (river) Valley, up a rough track past tiny hamlets to the trailhead. Deep in ancient forest we follow the rushing course of the Do Chhu deeper into this remote and untouched valley - very few foreigners have passed this way. In the season the flowering rhododendron provide a riot of colour and on a warm day Pilgrims may be tempted into a refreshing dip in one of many swimming holes. Towards the head of the valley the trail switchbacks as it steepens and Chumbu Monastery can be glimpsed above with craggy peaks looming behind. The monks at this spectacularly positioned and remote monastery afford all pilgrims a warm welcome particularly if they are bearing small gifts and offerings for the supernatural statue of the 'Flying Yogini', that seemingly floats in the air. Having paid our respects we climb higher to a beautiful mountain lake before bidding the monks a fond farewell and head for home.

Duration: 7-8 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

Guided with picnic

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 9 Saturday March 21st

Hike from Sang Choekor Buddhist College (2,800m) to Yak Pasture below Bumdra Monastery (3,800m)
The adventure begins with an early morning drive up to the Sang Choekor to meet our ponies and while they are being loaded we may pay our respects at the College. The initial 1–2 hour ascent of a ridge, which is steep at times though also in cool shade, brings us to a clearing with prayer flags and view down into both the Paro and Do Chhu valleys. Above and ahead the Chhoe Chhoe Tse Lhakhang (temple) nestles in the mountainside 1-2 hours walk away. The trail undulates for a while before the last steep pull up to the pretty temple which boasts commanding views south over Paro airport and from its own hot stone bath northwards to the snow capped Himalaya. After a final 20 minutes climb through ruins and fluttering prayer flags, with a last glance southwards we plunge back into ancient forest traversing for about 40 minutes then come out onto a high wide meadow dotted with sacred chortens and prayer flags. Our home for the night is tucked in under Bumdra Monastery (cave of a thousand prayers) making the most of the awesome views of the Himalayan range. After lunch we can visit the monastery (if it is occupied) and also climb the peak to the north (about 4000m) for even better views, returning in time for a slap up dinner.

Duration: 3 - 4 hours to camp 2-3 hours return trek to peak

Difficulty: Moderate to Hard

Guided with mineral water

Overnight: Bumdra Wilderness Camp

DAY 10 Sunday March 22nd

Hike from Yak Pasture below Bumdra Monastery (3,800m) via Sangtopelri Monasteries to Taktsang Monastery (2,900m)

After a hearty breakfast in the jaw dropping landscape, it is time to either head straight back into the valley or linger awhile soaking up the view and perhaps hang some prayer flags of our own. Eventually we have to drop back into the ancient pine and rhododendron forest on the monks' zig zagging trail. After 1-2 hours of descent we catch glimpses of the golden roofs of temples below and soon come upon the first of many on our way back from the wilds. The path snakes across the mountainside between the monasteries and temples before reaching the gardens of Sangtopelri (Heaven on Earth) from which you can bravely peer over edge and straight down onto the ornate roofs Taksang in the cliff far below. An hour later and we are at the gates of Taksang looking across the gorge a steep descent to a waterfall then ascent on steps and you are passing into the Tiger's Nest itself. Retracing our steps we begin the final descent of about 45 minutes to reach our vehicle and drive back to Uma Paro ... not forgetting to stop on the other side of the valley and look back at what you have achieved. 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: 5 - 7 hours depending on time taken in monasteries

Difficulty: Moderate - Guided with mineral water

Riding ponies are available at an additional charge

Overnight: Uma Paro

DAY 11 Monday March 23rd

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.

Package Inclusions

All Bhutanese Government Visa Fees, Taxes and Royalties

Accommodation on a full board basis throughout (excluding beverages)

The Services of an experienced English-speaking Bhutanese Uma Paro Guide

A full service one night wilderness camp

Entry permits and fees

Transport including airport transfers

Mineral water on all days out

Welcome drink at Uma Paro

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 13th and 23rd of March (any other flights will attract the FIT surcharge (\$ 30 pppd for two people and \$ 40 pppd for single travelers).



Packing Essentials: warm jacket; good leather or waterproof fabric boots or shoes with good soles; waterproof jacket; sunglasses; warm hat; sunhat; sunscreen; 4 season sleeping bag; torch; backpack; towel; thermal underwear.

Packing Recommended: trekking pole; gloves; tracksuit or thermal underwear; small backpack; torch; lip balm; a sufficient supply of any medication you are taking.

NB. Camera film is a rarity in Bhutan so bring your own supply which should be in your carry-on luggage.

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.

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.

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 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.