



BHUTAN

MOUNTAIN BIKE TREK

2017/18 TRIP NOTES





Bhutan Mountain Bike Trek 2017/18

Trip Notes

Adventure Consultants will organise a mountain biking trip to ride Bhutan's amazing network of trails for private groups, with dates that suit your own travel plans. Bhutan is known as 'the Land of the Thunder Dragon' and is an ancient Himalayan Kingdom. The country is steeped in Buddhist history and has only been open to foreign travellers since 1974.

There is only one main road in Bhutan, a paved single lane that traverses the country over several high passes. To travel anywhere else in Bhutan, you are restricted to travel on bumpy roads in vehicles or trekking on foot. Our trip will be unique as on mountain bikes, we will be able to explore off the beaten track and enjoy some world-class trail riding while we are at it!

The group will traverse Bhutan from West to East after arriving in Paro, and will explore two of the main valley systems around the Paro / Thimphu area and the Bumthang region in the East of the country. Many villages that we come across will be operating in the same way they have done for centuries and unlike other Himalayan Kingdoms, Bhutan has most of its virgin forest intact.



The Bhutanese are immensely proud of their cultural history and no visit to Bhutan would be complete without exploring their impressive monasteries, and learning how Buddhism has shaped the Kingdom as it is today. Our visits to various sacred sites will give us an insight into their beliefs, history, architecture and modern social structure.

Lodging along the way will be in Bhutanese guest houses and hotels, and a support vehicle able to accommodate everyone and their bikes will accompany the trip throughout Bhutan.

We have taken high altitude issues into account when developing our biking itinerary. We have included rest days at the relevant elevations to allow our bodies to adjust to the thinner air and we carry sufficient medication to deal with most altitude related problems. Experience has shown us that good hydration, rest days at significant elevations and good base fitness help avoid any significant problems when biking at altitude.

This unique departure to mountain bike the trails of Bhutan is a great opportunity to travel through a timeless Himalayan Kingdom. Early bookings are essential to ensure that processing our permit

goes smoothly. We also welcome non-cycling partners or travellers to join the expedition, as they will be able to accompany the trip throughout Bhutan.

Dates

You can book dates that suit your own travel plans. The best seasons to travel to Bhutan are March to May, or September to November.

Itinerary

Day	1	Meet in Bangkok for the trip orientation
	2	Fly to Paro from Bangkok and upon arrival, transfer to the hotel and explore the Paro Valley
	3	Transfer to Thimphu via road and explore Thimphu
	4	Biking to Punakha via the Dochu La
	5	Biking to Phojikha in the Gangtey Valley
	6	Biking to Bumthang region via the Pele La and Trongsa, stay Jakar
	7	Touring in the Bumthang Chokor Valley, stay Jakar
	8	Visit and explore Ura in Bumthang region, stay Jakar
	9	Explore Tang Valley to Ugyencholing Palace and back to Jakar
	10	Return over Pele La to Chuzom
	11	Explore Punakha, Dochu La to Thimphu, explore Thimphu
	12	Transfer to Paro and visit Taktsang Monastery
	13	Fly Paro to Bangkok to either depart Bangkok for home, onward travel or overnight Bangkok.

Detailed Itinerary

DAY 1: BANGKOK

We meet in Bangkok at the Novotel Airport Hotel for an orientation and bike check at 7.00pm today. We will go over the packaging of your bike and sort out any gear problems you may have.

DAY 2: PARO

Depart from Bangkok this morning on the Druk Air flight to Paro, Bhutan. If the weather is clear, you may see Kanchenjunga, Mt. Everest and Chomolhari, Bhutan's sacred mountain. Upon arrival in Paro and after completing visa formalities, we will be met at the airport by our local tour guides and accompanied to our hotel, the beautifully crafted new Zhiwa Ling Hotel.

After assembling our bikes we can spend half a day biking to places of interest in the Paro Valley, starting with the Ta Dzong, a 17th century monument which now houses the National Museum and then the Ugyen Pelri, a small jewel like palace belonging to the Royal Family of Bhutan. Along the way we'll pass one of the innumerable archery grounds. Archery is the national sport of Bhutan and most men grow up learning the sport. If we are lucky, we may catch a match in action.

DAY 3: THIMPHU

We leave Paro this morning on our bikes and follow the winding road beside the Pa Chu (chu means river or water) to its confluence with the Thimphu River and onto the Nation's capital, Thimphu and our hotel. After checking in and refreshing ourselves, we will head out to do some sightseeing and there is the chance to do a ride into the upper reaches of the valley also.

Because a dress code is necessary to be observed in some of the areas in Thimphu, we will continue with our sightseeing programme by vehicle. The first stop will be a visit to the Dechenphodrang Monastic School, which was the original site of the Thimphu Dzong and is now the State Monastic School. The National Library will also prove to be an interesting stop, as will the Jigmie Dorji Memorial Chorten; a beautiful monument erected in memory of the late King. Many religious ceremonies and gatherings take place here throughout the year. The evening is free to explore the streets of Thimphu.

DAY 4: PUNAKHA

We will have an early start today for a full day biking to the ancient winter capital of Punakha. The full distance covered biking on the highway will be approximately 80 kms/50 miles. It is about 25 kms/15.5 miles to reach the Dochu La Pass at an altitude of 3,048m/10,000ft. In good weather many of the Bhutanese Himalayan summits are in view. Up until the pass, it is uphill all the way.



After stopping for lunch and to take in the view, we continue travelling down to the Punakha Valley below at an altitude of 1,372m/4,500ft. It is downhill all the way from the pass with amazing scenery, as the valley is the richest agricultural region of Bhutan. The Punakha Dzong built in 1637 by Shabdrung is situated at the confluence of the 'Po' and 'Mo' Chu's (Father and Mother Rivers) guarding the Southern end of the Punakha Valley. This huge fortress/Monastery was the capital of Bhutan until 1966.

DAY 5: GANGTEY

The 21 kms/13 miles between Punakha to Wangdhi is a relatively flat cycle. The impressive Wangdhi Dzong reaches skyward from a strategic spur at the confluence of the Tang and Po Chu's, and has a commanding view of the valley below. Like all Dzongs, it has a section for the monks and another for the secular authorities. After Wangdhi, the road climbs steadily passing through semi tropical vegetation – banana plants and cactus to pine forests, and then to an alpine environment that is home to rhododendrons and dwarf bamboo. As we near the Pele La, we will take a detour onto a side road ('completed' in the late 80's) which leads us to the valley of Phobjikha. With a combination of biking and riding on the tour bus, we will plan on reaching our destination before dark.

Considered one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan, it is encircled by pine forests. In the centre of the valley, rising from a small ridge stands one of the oldest private monasteries in Bhutan – Gangtey Gompa. We will have the opportunity to visit the courtyard of the monastery. The head Lama of Gangtey Gompa is the ninth incarnation of the body of Pemalingpa - the famous 14th century blacksmith from Bumthang, who is one of Bhutan's most famous Buddhist saints and teachers.

The area is equally famous as the winter home to the very rare Black Necked Crane. Experts estimate that fewer than 800 cranes exist in the wild. The Cranes arrive in November and stay through to March.

A short bike ride from the monastery will take us down valley to our accommodation for the evening, which is the rather plush Dewachen Hotel.

DAY 6: BUMTHANG

Again with a combination of partly biking and riding on the tour bus, we head for Bumthang. The distance covered will be approximately 160 km. We return to the main road and then climb up the Pele La (3,299m/10,825ft). On the way to Tongsa, we will stop for lunch at the Chendibji Chorten; an ancient shrine built on the old walking path across the country. The first sight of Tongsa Dzong, the largest in Bhutan, appears across the valley but the road winds another 20 kms/12.4 miles before reaching Tongsa.

We will have a chance to explore the shops of Tongsa, before continuing onto Jakar in Bumthang.

DAY 7: BUMTHANG

A full day's biking tour of the Bumthang Chokor Valley, noted as one of the most beautiful and sacred in Bhutan. This valley has a history hallowed by the frequent visits of Padmasambhava when he was bringing the Buddha's message to Bhutan. He meditated in caves around the valley, which now have temples and shrines associated with them. The valley is wide, filled with fields and village folk busy with their day's work. We will visit Kurje, a 17th century temple next to which a spectacular new monastery is being built in traditional style. In the late afternoon, there will be time to visit the shops which line the single main street here, famous for some of the fabrics singular to the Bumthang District.

DAY 8: URA

Today we will bike to the highest of the four valleys which make up the Bumthang Valley. From the Tang Valley, the road gradually climbs through the scenic country side to Ura La (3,408m/11,180ft) which is marked by a chorten and mani wall. Just before the pass and if the weather is clear, magnificent views of Bhutan's highest peaks, Gangkhar Punsum (7,239m/23,750ft) can be seen.

The village of Ura, unlike most Bhutanese villages is made up of closely clustered houses centred around a new temple recently dedicated to Guru Rimpoche. From Ura we will bike on the recently constructed road leading up to the neighbouring village of Shingkar. This beautiful village is entered around an old temple and manor house that hosts the annual Shingkar Festival.

After a packed lunch and a walk through the village, we can visit the manor house to observe rural Bhutanese life. By late afternoon, we will head back to Jakar by a combination of riding and travel on our accompanying bus.

DAY 9: UGYENCHOLING

The aim is to make a full day's biking tour of the Tang Valley. We will stop at several important religious pilgrimage sites including Mebartsho, 'the burning lake' and Tang Rimochen Lhakhang.

One track leads up to the base of Ugyencholing Dzong. The valley is named after this lordly residence, which dominates the valley and is one of the most important



ancestral manor houses in Bhutan. It is a short walk up to the Dzong from the point we can bike to. After a picnic lunch and a walk through the surrounding village, we will bike back to our guesthouse in Jakar. The distance from Jakar to Ugyen Choling is approximately 35 kms/21.7 miles.

DAY 10: RETURN OVER THE PELE LA

Again today we will be partly biking and riding on the tour bus. Distance covered will be 190 kms/118 miles approximately. We return over the Pele La (for the longest downhill of the trip!) and stay at the Chuzom Sa Resort.

DAY 11: THIMPHU

We are planning on an early morning departure to visit the Punakha Dzong, and then we travel over the Dochu La for a chance to view the Bhutanese Himalayas. In the early afternoon, we will return to Thimphu. The rest of the day is free to roam Thimphu for sightseeing, shopping or more riding, or we can visit at the Thimphu Dzong.

DAY 12: EXPLORE TAKTSANG

Today we transfer back to Paro and then drive the winding road beside the Pa Chu to Satsam Chorten.

From this point, we begin the challenging hike to Taktsang, the Tiger's Nest. A vantage point directly across a gorge from the temple can be reached in about four hours. This magical Monastery clings to a vertical granite cliff 61m/200ft above the valley floor. Legend says that Guru Padmasambhava flew here on the back of a tiger to meditate. The tiger was actually his favourite consort, Yeshe Tshogyel, whom he transformed in to a flying tiger for the purposes of this journey. They meditated in the cave and when the Guru left, he instructed that the monastery be built.

With a relaxing of the restrictions, which were in effect until January of 1991, we may be allowed to enter Taktsang. If so, it must be noted that it is one of the most holy and revered pilgrimage sites in Bhutan. Our behaviour within the temple complex will have a direct impact on future permissions to enter the area. The temple tour guide will notify us of the appropriate behaviour.

Tonight we will have a farewell dinner together as we enjoy our last evening in Bhutan.

DAY 13: DEPARTURE

After breakfast, we return to the airport for our departure from the land of the Thunder Dragon for Bangkok on Druk Air, and then onward travel home.

Expedition Fee

The cost of the trek ex Bangkok will be supplied on application.

The trek fee includes the following:

- Bhutan government royalty fees
- All trip organisational requirements
- Hotel/lodge accommodation and all meals in Bhutan
- All permits/visas to visit Bhutan
- Air transport from Bangkok to Paro and return on Druk Air
- Back up tour bus for the cycling days

- Local Bhutanese tour guide
- Mountain bike repair technician and tools
- Personal baggage allowance of 20kg per person

The trek fee does not include the following:

- Air travel to/from Bangkok, Thailand
- Accommodation or meals in Bangkok
- Mountain bike suitable for off-road riding and travel bag/box
- Purchases of bottled water while on the trip, gifts or alcohol.
- Personal clothing and equipment
- Excess baggage charges on flights to/from Paro, Bhutan
- Personal travel / trip cancellation / rescue insurance

Deposit

A non-refundable deposit will be payable to secure a place on this trip.

Balance

The balance of funds is payable 90 days prior to the expedition start date.

Payments

All payments should be made by bank transfer to the following bank and account:

**Bank of New Zealand
Offshore Branch
1 Willis Street
Wellington
New Zealand**

for the account of **Adventure Consultants Limited**

Account # **1000-594771-0000**
Account Type: **US Dollars**
Swift Address: **BKNZNZ22**

Note: All bank transfer charges are for the **remitters account**.

We can also accept your deposit by credit card (Visa, Mastercard, Amex), and your balance payment by credit card plus a 3% credit card fee.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Once you have paid your deposit your trip is confirmed, subject to payment of the balance of fees owing 90 days prior to your trip commencement date. An expedition trek member may then cancel his/her participation on the following basis:

- Cancellations outside of 90 days will result in the loss of the trip deposit.
- For cancellations made within 89-60 days of the trip commencement date we reserve the right to retain 50% of the full fee.
- For cancellations within 59 days of the departure date a cancellation fee of 100% of the full fee applies.

Team members should take out private trip cancellation insurance if they wish to be covered against cancellation due to medical or personal or other reasons.

Team Membership

The trek can be customised according to your group size and guides will be allocated accordingly.

Fitness

We are cycling in high and remote terrain at moderately high altitudes. It would be best to have a moderate level of fitness to enjoy the experience to its fullest. The trails are sometimes steep and a couple of the days are quite long but it is possible to ride in the accompanying tour bus when you run out of steam. Weather can deteriorate and rain, strong winds and even some snow are possible. However we are travelling at a mild time of the year in the fall to best appreciate the surroundings.

Bikes

We recommend that you bring a mountain bike that you are familiar with, i.e. not too new. The bike should at least have front suspension, but full suspension is not a necessity either. As the trip crosses several high altitude passes, your bike should be suitable for sustained climbing. Tyres suitable for riding on hard packed off road conditions are recommended.

It is very important that your bike is in excellent running order before the trip. If you have servicing work done before leaving for Bhutan, make sure you have ridden your bike several times before departure, ensuring everything is working as it should be.

We will be carrying tools and some spare parts for roadside repairs. Do not expect to be able to purchase any bicycle products while in Bhutan. If you are bringing a mountain bike with 29 inch wheels, please let us know this when booking your trip.

Travel to and from Bhutan

There is only one national airline for Bhutan, Druk Air. The airline operates two BAe146-100 series aeroplanes. There are generally only a couple of flights per day out of Bangkok and they are very strict about baggage allowances. We will need to limit the amount of baggage we can take to Bhutan and ideally you should travel with one robust bike bag/box, and one smaller travel duffel containing your personal gear. The airline allows 20kg/40lbs of baggage per person, so expect to pay some excess baggage in order to get your bike on to the same flight. Mountain bikes weigh on average 15kg/33lbs, so in the past excess baggage charges have been about US\$100 per person per flight. Please keep in mind that the extra effort to travel internationally with your bike will be rewarded by being able to mountain bike in Bhutan!

Food and Accommodation

Food will be of the highest standard possible, given the remoteness of the situation, but please rest assured that the standard of lodging in Bhutan is in fact very high. Breakfast and dinner will be buffet style meals in the Bhutanese lodges, and lunches will be taken in villages along the way or a daily packed lunch. Please inform us if you have any special dietary requirements.

As mentioned, the standard of the lodges and hotels that we will stay at is very good, for when travelling in this Himalayan Mountain Kingdom. Rooms will be on a twin or dormitory share basis, and you will not need to bring a sleeping bag as linen is supplied.

Festivals

The dates for festivals in Bhutan change every year. You may wish to overlap your trip with one of the following main festivals, or alternatively smaller festivals are held almost every month – contact us for details. Please note that the Thimpu Tsechu is the busiest festival in Bhutan so it can be very busy around Paro and Thimphu at this time, but other areas of Bhutan further east where we travel remain relatively quiet.

- Wangduephodrang Tshechu Festival 28-30 September, 2017 and 17-19 September, 2018.
 - Thimphu Tsechu Festival 30 September - 2 October, 2017 and 19-21 September, 2018.
 - Jambay Lhakhang Drup Festival 4-6 November, 2017 and 24-27 October, 2018.
 - Paro Tshechu Festival 7-11 April, 2017 and 27-31 March, 2018.
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Equipment List

A list detailing all the necessary clothing and equipment trip members need to bring will be sent to you upon receiving your booking confirmation. If you have any queries about items on the list, please do ask as we can help you source any items you are missing or needing to upgrade with our retail service.

Medical Examination

Trip members will be provided with a medical questionnaire and asked to return this to us prior to the trip. This information will be sighted only by our consulting doctor(s) and treated with confidentiality. Advice on immunisations will be provided at this time.

Documents and Photographs

Trip members will need to provide 3 passport-photographs for permits to travel in Bhutan and a copy of their passport bio-data page.

Recommended Reading

'Kingdoms Beyond the Clouds – Journeys in Search of the Himalayan Kings' by Jonathan Gregson, published by MacMillan, 2000.

'A Baby in a Backpack to Bhutan' by Bunty Avieson, published by MacMillan, 2004.

'Beyond the Sky and the Earth; A Journey into Bhutan' by Jamie Zeppa, 1999.

How to Join

If you would like to join us mountain biking in Bhutan, please fill out an application form and forward to our office along with the deposit.

If you require more information please contact us at;

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Adventure Consultants – is affiliated to the New Zealand Mountain Guides Association (NZMGA), New Zealand Alpine Club (NZAC) and a corporate member of the American Alpine Club (AAC). Adventure Consultants perform to IFMGA/UIAGM standards and are world leaders in high altitude guiding.

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