



Sky Mind Retreats

Sacred Bhutan Retreat: Walking and Meditation in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

November 23 - December 8, 2024

Trip Itinerary

We will begin our trip by gathering in Bangkok. From there we fly to Paro, and our adventure in Bhutan begins. We will integrate our dharma practice into our travel by practicing sitting and/or walking meditation on most days, and by practicing in action with the people and situations we encounter. Keep in mind that we are entering a more relaxed and spontaneous culture, and some elements of this itinerary may change. Part of our practice will be in allowing things to unfold as they do, rather than as they are planned!

TRAVEL DAY-Friday, November 22

Travel day. Most flights from the US to Bangkok fly east, crossing the date line and arriving on the following day. You may want to travel a day or two earlier, so that you have time to recover from jet lag in Bangkok.

DAY ONE- Saturday, November 23

We'll gather at a small hotel in Bangkok, meeting at approximately 5 pm. An opportunity to meet up - have dinner – and prepare for an early morning departure. . . In-house excellent food: Thai of course!

DAY TWO-Sunday, November 24

An afternoon flight from Bangkok takes us along the Himalayas to Paro, a small town at 7,000' that hosts Bhutan's primary airstrip. Paro is located in a beautiful valley, lined with apple orchards and green terraced fields. We will take a leisurely walk through the villages and have a relaxed picnic lunch at Dzongdrakha, a seldom-visited Cliffside temple complex set high above the valley. After lunch, we will have our first opportunity to visit, and quietly sit, in a traditional Bhutanese temple, then hike back through fields and apple orchards arriving in Bondey village. Some afternoon time to wander in the town of Paro.



This day will include orienting us to our journey, getting to know our guides and each other. We will stay in Paro for two nights at the Layul Resort.

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DAY FOUR-Tuesday, November 26

Today we will drive to Punakha, with several stops along the way. We will pass through Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, which is likely the only capital in the world without a traffic light. Here we'll stretch our legs and view the Buddha Dordenma, made of bronze and gilded gold. This magnificent statue is the largest Buddha statue in the world and is located amidst the ruins of Kuensel Phodrang.

The high point of the day's journey is Dochula Pass, at 10,000', where weather permitting, we will have magnificent views of the gigantic, snow covered peaks of the Eastern Himalayas. From the pass we drop down to the lowlands of the Punakha Valley at just 4,000', passing forests of rhododendron and magnolia. For those interested and weather allowing, we will have the opportunity for a walk from the pass and we will stay at the Meri Puensem Resort for two nights.

DAY THREE-Monday, November 25

We will drive to the beautiful Chele La, a high pass with spectacular views of the high Himalayan Peaks and walk among the abundant prayer flags. Our group will then walk across and down through a pristine high altitude forest to Kila Nunnery. After enjoying a picnic lunch, we will visit the Kila Nunnery temple.



DAY FIVE-Wednesday, November 27

In the morning, we will hike through villages, farm land and orchards to arrive at the Khamsum Yuli Namgyal Temple, a fabulous three story temple built on the top of a hill by the Queen Mother as an act of protection for her son the King.

In the afternoon, we will visit the Punakha Dzong, built on a river island at the confluence of the Phochu and Mochu rivers, and possibly the most beautiful Dzong in Bhutan.





DAY SIX-Thursday, November 28

Today we drive (3 hours) to the little visited Phobjikha Valley, nestled at 9,500' on the western slopes of the Black Mountains. En route we'll stop for a half hour walk across rice paddies and past a local village to Chimi Lhakhang, the temple of the 'Divine Mad Man', where Bhutanese come for fertility blessings.

In the afternoon, we'll explore the Phobjikha Valley on foot-and have the opportunity to see Bhutan's beautiful black-necked cranes in their winter habitat. We will follow the Khewa Chu stream through open meadows to a small, seldom visited monastery built in the 13th century, and recently brought back to life as an active monastery for about 30 young monks. We stay at the remote Dewachen Inn, a luxurious wood-heated hotel.

DAY SEVEN-Friday, November 29

Today we head to Bumthang province, known as the spiritual heart of Bhutan. A dramatic drive takes us through the town of Trongsa, where we will stop to visit the Trongsa Dzong, considered the most impressive masterpiece of Bhutanese architecture. We will spend the first of two nights at the Chumey Valley at the Chumey Nature Resort. The Chumey Valley is the home of Bhutan's famous yathra weaving-a geometrically complex weaving of hand-spun wool.



DAY EIGHT-Saturday, November 30



We will spend the morning at Tharpaling Monastery, perched high above the Chumey Valley. This goemba houses over 100 monks and several temples, including the high hermitage of Choedrak Goemba, above Tharpaling at 12,400'. This location was a primary retreat place for Longchenpa, Dzogchen master of the 14th century and author of many significant Dzogchen texts. After visiting the monastery, we hike to KiKiLa Pass, a remote high pass that is the home to a glass-encased golden statue of Longchenpa.

DAY NINE-Sunday, December 1

We will drive through Jakar to the Tang Valley deeper into Bumthang. We will visit the Dungbe Thang Zangdo Pelri, an elaborate three dimensional shrine with serpents on the high roof. We will then visit the Pema Choling Nunnery, where over 100 nuns, mostly teenagers and young women, study and practice. Our guide's sister has lived at Pema Choling monastery, and Susie has dharma friends here we will visit. We will have lunch and they possibly will chant for us in their newly completed beautiful temple. We will arrive at the Ogyen Choling Palace where we will stay for three nights.

**DAY TEN Monday, December 2**

We will settle into Ogyen Choling Palace for a day of practice. The palace was the home of a noble family until recent times and includes fabulous temple rooms separately dedicated to Tara, the Buddha, and other deities. The central tower of the complex is now an extensive and well curated museum (with English explanations).

DAY ELEVEN-Tuesday, December 3

For our third day at Ogyen Choling there will be the option of visiting the Thowadrak Goempa (2-3 hour hike uphill). This remote cliff temple is also a long-term retreat place under the direction of the delightful Pema Sherab Dorji Rinpoche with whom we will ask for an audience. For those desiring a mellower walk, there are three private lankhangs to be seen via a beautiful walk through the neighboring village, along the river and through the Tang Valley. In addition, about 15 minutes above the palace, is a favorite sitting spot of Longchenpa that is a welcome place to go and take in the wide spaces. We will again stay at Ogyen Choling for the night.

DAY TWELVE-Wednesday, December 4

Today we return to the central Bumthang valley of Chokhar. We will visit Kenchhosum Llakhang– a freshly restored and grand temple - and Tamshing Goemba, a deeply sacred temple built in the 1500's. We will spend the afternoon visiting Bumthang's most treasured temples- Kurjey Lhakhang and Jambay Lhakhang. The latter was built here in the 7th Century by the Tibetan King Songtsen Goempo, even before the arrival of Guru Rinpoche. A little walk to the north is Kurjey, built around the cave where Guru Rinpoche meditated and left the imprint of his body on a rock. Kurjey is considered one of the holiest places in Bhutan. We will be staying in the Bumthang Valley.

**DAY THIRTEEN-Thursday, December 5**

We will take a flight from Bumthang to Paro.

We will spend the remainder of the day visiting Kyichu Lhakhang, (the temple that was Dilgo Kyentse Rinpoche's home) and (optionally) the National Museum. We will meet with Director Khenpo Phuntsho Tashi (if in residence). We will return to Paro for our overnight stay and to prepare for our trek.



DAY FOURTEEN-Friday, December 6

Leaving Paro, we will give our gear to the horses and start our overnight trek to Bumdra monastery. A five-hour hike (2500' elevation gain and 5 miles with many rests and a picnic lunch along the way) takes us to our camp at

13,500'. We will spend time at the camp to relax and enjoy the expansive mountain views, or visit neighboring sites. For the curious and still energetic, above the camp, there are sacred sky burial sites worthy of the effort. Our 'luxury camp' will include standup tents with cots, a dining tent with space heaters, and delicious meals prepared by our crew.

For those who choose not to do the trek, there will be the option of visiting Dra Karpo, a cliff temple and sacred rock-mound that is the other place Guru Rinpoche is understood to have visited when he came to Tiger's Nest. The devoted do 108 circumambulations of the large hillside cliff (which takes 3 or 4 days), and the place is rich with stories.

DAY FIFTEEN-Saturday, December 7

We hike approximately three hours, all downhill, visiting several remote monasteries on the way. The highlight of the day is one of Bhutan's most sacred places - Taktsang (also known as Tiger's Nest) Monastery. This monastery, perched on the side of a sheer cliff, was built atop the cave where Guru Rinpoche, the father of Tibetan Buddhism, meditated for three months after arriving in the Paro Valley on the back of a legendary flying tigress. We will practice in one of several shrine rooms of this incredible monastery before continuing for another two hours walk down to the road and back to Paro, where we will stay again at the Gangtey Palace Hotel. For those who choose not to do the trek, an early morning departure will allow you to hike uphill to rejoin the group for the visit to Taktsang.



DAY SIXTEEN-Sunday, December 8

We will conclude our time in Bhutan with sitting, reflection, and goodbyes to our local guides, and catch a late morning flight back to Bangkok.

Our trip will end in Bangkok, upon our arrival in the airport in the afternoon.

Namgay - our guide throughout the journey



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