

**JOMOLHARI TREK & BLACKED-NECKED  
CRANE BUDDHIST FESTIVAL  
BHUTAN OCT/NOV 2023  
ESCORTED BY MIKE WOOD**



## Bhutan's Jomolhari Base Camp trek & Black-Neck Crane Festival



# "Bhutan's Jomolhari Base Camp & the Black-Necked Crane Buddhist Festival"

26 Oct - 14 Nov 2023 - 20 days USD\$8,995 ex Bangkok  
(USD\$1,500 for Single Supplement)

Little has changed over the centuries in the Kingdom of Bhutan, perched among the pristine forests and snow-capped peaks of the Himalaya. Its rich historic and cultural traditions are memorably expressed in its architecture – mountain-top monasteries, Buddhist temples and traditional villages – as well as in its textiles and its hardy and proud people.

With this tour we are endeavouring to combine trekking with culture when we take you from major towns, such as Paro and Thimphu, to remote valleys, such as Phobjikha, home to the rare Black-Necked Crane and its yearly Buddhist festival and offer you the best of this unique country.

Jomolhari Trek – 10 days/ 9 nights

This 10 day/ 9 night trek is a Bhutan classic, though not a crowded route and you usually have the trails to yourselves. It offers a wide range of landscapes, from high ridges to forests and wind-swept passes with magnificent views of Mt Jomolhari (7316m). The altitude range is from 2500 m - 4930m

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# TRIP OUTLINE

- 26 Oct Thu 2023 - ARRIVE PARO - Kangkhu Resort or similar, sight-seeing.
- 27 Oct Fri - PARO - Hike to Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) and other sight-seeing.
- 28 Oct Sat - SHINGKARUP – Begin trek from Gunetshawa to Shingkarup
- 29 Oct Sun - SOI THANGTHANGKHA – Trek to Soi Thangthangkha
- 30 Oct Mon - JANGOTHANG – Trek to Jangothang (4,000m)
- 31 Oct Tue - JANGOTHANG – Acclimatisation day in Jangothang – day hikes
- 01 Nov Wed - LINGSHI - Trek Lingshi (cross Nyele La 4,890m)
- 02 Nov Thu - LINGSHI – In Lingshi – day hikes
- 03 Nov Fri - SODHU – Trek to Sodhu (cross Yele La 4,820m)
- 04 Nov Sat - BARSHONG – Trek to Barshong
- 05 Nov Sun - DOLAM KENCHO – Trek to Dolam Kencho
- 06 Nov Mon - THIMPHU – Trek to Dodena / drive Thimphu. Tashi Yoedling Hotel
- 07 Nov Tue - THIMPHU – Visit Tashicho Dzong, Zorig Chusum Institute,
- 08 Nov Wed - PUNAKHA - Drive to Punakha - 3 hrs, Zhingkhram Hotel,
- 09 Nov Thu - GANGTEY - Drive to Gangtey. Kichu Resort, Gangtey
- 10 Nov Fri - GANGTEY - 2 hour nature walk and free afternoon
- 11 Nov Sat - GANGTEY – Gangtey – Festival of the Black-Necked Crane.
- 12 Nov Sun - THIMPU - Drive to Thimphu, Tashi Yoedling Hotel
- 13 Nov Mon - PARO - Drive to Paro, Feature stay in Zhiwa Ling Heritage Hotel
- 14 Nov Tue - DEPART PARO FOR BANGKOK

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# DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

## Day 1 - ARRIVE PARO – Thu Oct 26, 2023

### Kangkhu Resort or similar

Fly into Paro from BKK with Druk airlines

Sightseeing – Paro Dzong, National Museum, Kichu Lhakhang

Once arrival formalities are complete we will head for morning tea (or lunch, (depending on flight timings) after which we will check in to our hotel in Paro. Once settled in we will head off to visit the great Rinpung Dzong. Dzongs are large monastery fortresses which dominate every major town in Bhutan. They are the administrative and religious centres of the district and were once the mainstay of that district's defences against invading Tibetans and, often, rival Bhutanese clans.

We will then visit the Kyichu Lhakhang - one of Bhutan's oldest and most beautiful temples. The temple is popularly believed to have been built in 659 CE by King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet, to pin down the left foot of a giant ogress who was thwarting the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. Elderly pilgrims constantly shuffle around the temple spinning its many prayer wheels, making this one of the most spiritually significant and charming spots in the valley. The evening, like most in Bhutan, is free to relax and enjoy Bhutanese hospitality and the company of your fellow travellers.



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# DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

**Day 2 - PARO – Fri Oct 27,**

**Tashi Namgay Resort or similar**

Hike to Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Full day \Today we will be making the climb up to the famous Tiger's Nest or Taktsang Monastery (3120m) which is perched some 900m up on a cliff overlooking the Paro valley and is said to be the spot where the legendary Indian saint, Guru Padma Sambhawa flew from Tibet on the back of a tiger to defeat five demons who were opposing the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan. The climb is on a good path and is a steady (though not vertically steep) ascent to first a café (from where you get good views of the monastery) or onwards and upwards to the monastery itself. You will sleep well on this night !

**Day 3 Trek Sat Oct 28, Gunetshawa – Shingkarup (3/4 hours walk).**

We depart Paro early this morning by road via Drukgyel Dzong to the village of Gunetshawa (3 hrs). From here the trek begins. The trail gradually climbs above the Pa Chhu (Paro River) through forests of oak and rhododendron until you enter the Jigme Dorji National Park where the valley eventually narrows to a small track which descends to a meadow where you camp. Weather permitting you should have your first view of Mt Jomolhari from the camp (3,610 m).

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# DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

#### **Day 04 Trek, Sun 29 Oct: Shingkarap to Soi Thangthangkha (4/5 hrs)**

Today we continue uphill through the river valley, which narrows and closes in after some distance. There is a major trail heading off to the left which leads to Phari in Tibet – a major trading route of the past. The trail then winds up and down along the drainage ridges to our campsite, located in a meadow by a stone shelter.

#### **Day 05 Trek, Mon 30 Oct: Soi Thangthangkha – Jangothang (4000m) (5/6 hours)**

Today we walk up along the Pa Chu (Paro River), past a small army outpost where the valley begins to widen again. You can now clearly view the surrounding high ridges and the snow-capped mountains as well as yaks and the yak herder's winter homes. The approach to the Jangothang camp (4080m) is marked by mani walls and chortens adorned with colourful prayer flags as well as a spectacular view of Mount. Jomolhari (7,314m). Camp is beneath a ruined fortress at the base of Jomolhari and, if the weather is clear, affords a great view of Jitchu Drake, a 6989m peak with a double summit – first climbed by British mountaineer Doug Scott in 1988. As of 2003 mountaineering is no longer permitted in Bhutan.

#### **Day 06 Trek Rest Day, Tue 31 Oct: Jangothang (4000m)**

Today is an acclimatisation and rest day and also a day to explore Jangothang. One can choose to hike a couple of hours towards Mount Jomolhari to see the glacial Tshophu Lake. Another option is to climb 500m above camp to see spectacular views of both Jomolhari and Jitchu Drake. The hike would take you about 3 hours.

#### **Day 07 Trek, Wed 01 Nov: Jangothang to Lingshi (18 km, time – 6/7 hours).**

A short walk from Jangothang, the last settlement in the valley, and you are offered spectacular views of two of Bhutan's major peaks, Jitchu Drake (6,989m) and Tserim Kang (6,789m). About four hours from Jangothang you will cross the 4890m Nyele La (pass), after which the trail climbs along a tributary of Mo Chhu River and gradually drops to the site of Lingshi camp at 4010m.

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# DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

**Day 08 Trek, Rest day Thu 02 Nov: Day in Lingshi.**

Today can be spent in rest and acclimatisation or you can hike 3-4 hrs to Tsokha at 4500m, the base camp of Jitchu Drake. You may even see Himalayan blue sheep and musk deer along this route.

**Day 09 Trek, Fri 03 Nov: Lingshi to Sodhu (22 km, time – 8/9 hours).**

Lingshi to Sodhu (distance – 22 km, time – 8/9 hours).

The trail today crosses Yele La (4,820m) from where you will get wonderful views of Jomolhari (7,314m), Gangchen Ta (6,840m), Tsherim Kang (6,789m) and Masang Gang (7,165m). Your camp on this day is located near a stream in a meadow at an altitude of 4,110m – with spectacular mountain scenery surrounding it.



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## DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

**Day 10 Trek, Sat 04 Nov: Shodu to Barshong (16 km, time – 5/6 hours).**

Today the trail climbs and falls as it follows the Thimphu Chu (river) through a steep-walled canyon beneath towering cliffs on one side and cypress forest on the other. You will cross this river many times before making camp at Barshong (3680m)



**Day 11 Trek, Sun 05 Nov: Barshong to Dolam Kencho (15 km, – 5/6 hours).**

Today you drop gently through dense forest of rhododendron, birch and conifer to reach the Thimphu Chu before a steep descent to Dolam Kencho, a beautiful meadow at 3430m where you camp.

**Day 12 Trek, Mon 06 Nov: Dolam Kencho to Dodena – Thimphu (8 km, 3 hours).**

After climbing through conifer and broad-leaf forests to a pass at 3,510m you descend steeply to the Thimphu Chu and walk on to Dodena (2,600m) where the trek ends and your vehicle collects you for the drive to Thimphu.

Our Hotel in Thimphu is the Tashi Yoedling Hotel (deluxe rooms with a view of Memorial Chorten <http://www.tashiyoedling.com/>) a free afternoon to relax and clean up.



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# DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

## Day 13 Tue 07 Nov - THIMPHU

Today we will visit the great Tashichho Dzong – administrative and monastic centre of

Bhutan. Tashichho Dzong has been the seat of the government since 1952 and presently houses the throne room and offices of the king, the secretariat and the ministries of home affairs and finance. It was first constructed in 1216 A.D. by Lama Gyalwa Lhanangpa where Dechen Phodrang now stands above Thimphu. In 1641, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal acquired it but finding it too small, he built another one, known as the lower Dzong. The original Dzong was destroyed by fire in 1771 and everything was moved to the lower dzong. The new building was later expanded several times over the years. It was damaged during an earthquake in 1897 and rebuilt in 1902. King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck had it completely renovated and enlarged over five years after he moved the capital to Thimphu in 1952 in traditional style using neither nails nor written plans.

We will also visit the Textile Museum at the Royal Textile Academy, .located near the National Library of Bhutan. Since its establishment in 2001, the museum has generated national and international attention and has garnered a substantial collection of antique textile artefacts, exclusive to Bhutan. We can also drive up to the Buddha Dordemma. Buddha Dordenma is a giant Shakyamuni Buddha statue which stands high above the entrance to the Thimphu Valley celebrating the 60th anniversary of fourth king.



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# DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

## Day 14 Wed 08 Nov - PUNAKHA

After breakfast today we depart for Punakha (approx 3 hours), the old winter capital of the Bhutanese monarchs and clergy. Leaving Thimphu, the road climbs via a series of zigzags over the Dochu La Pass at 3,000m. On a clear day panoramic views can be had of the eastern Himalaya, including Bhutan's highest mountain, Gangkhar Puensum (7,550m). The road then drops down through varied forest finally emerging into the highly-cultivated Punakha valley. The majestic Punakha Dzong, arguably Bhutan's most beautiful, sits in a splendid location at the confluence of two mighty Himalayan rivers – the Pho Chhu (father) and Mo Chhu (mother). It was the second to be built in Bhutan and it served as the capital and seat of government until the mid-1950s. All of Bhutan's kings have been crowned here. The Dzong is still the winter residence of the Je Khempo, Bhutan's monastic and spiritual leader



Time permitting we may also visit Chimi Lhakhang monastery, a Buddhist monastery just outside Punakha. It stands on a round hillock and was built in 1499 by the 14th Drukpa hierarch, Ngawang Choegyel, after the site was blessed by the "Divine Madman" the maverick saint Drukpa Kunley (1455–1529) who built a chorten on the site. In founding the site it is said that Lama Kunley subdued a demon of Dochu La with his "magic thunderbolt of wisdom" and trapped it in a rock at the location close to where the chorten now stands. He was known as the "Mad Saint" or "Divine Madman" for his unorthodox ways of teaching Buddhism by singing, humour and outrageous behaviour, often of a sexual nature He is also the saint who advocated the use of phallus symbols as paintings on walls and as flying carved wooden phalluses on house tops at the four corners of the eaves. The monastery is the repository of the original wooden symbol of a phallus that Kunley brought from Tibet.

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## DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

### Day 15 Thu 09 Nov - GANGTEY

Today we drive 3.5 hours (depending on road conditions) to the beautiful Phobjikha Valley, a stunning glacial valley on the western slopes of the Black Mountains deep in central Bhutan. It is also one of the most important wildlife preserves in the country and the winter home of the rare Black-Necked Crane, which come to this serene valley in late Oct and stay until March. We may also be lucky enough to see muntjaks (barking deer), wild boars, sambars, Himalayan black bears, leopards and red foxes – all native to this region. Gangtey Gompa, established in 1613, sits on top of a conical hill in the middle of the valley with the small township nestling at its feet.



### Day 16 Fri 10 Nov GANGTEY

This morning we will take a short nature walk (2-3hrs) in the broad Phobjikha Valley. It is an easy walk but takes us into some beautiful forest and closer to the valley floor where the cranes spend their days. Then there will be time to simply relax and wander the village and soak up this special time in this exquisite and remote Himalayan valley.

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## DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

### Day 17 Sat 11 Nov GANGTEY - Festival Day - THE BLACK-NECKED CRANE FESTIVAL

Nestled in the inner Himalaya at about 3000 metres above sea level, Phobjikha is a wide alpine wetland valley that is considered the largest and the most significant wetland in the country. It is often cited for the harmonious co- existence of its inhabitants with nature and the valley also holds great cultural significance for locals and indeed, all Bhutanese. The valley is the most significant wintering ground of the rare and endangered Black- Necked Cranes in Bhutan and is fiercely protected by the government conservation bodies. Every year, over 500 cranes migrate to Bhutan from the high Tibetan Plateau and spend their winter months in this relatively warm valley. Additionally, the highly revered Gangtey Monastery that overlooks the wetlands, surrounded by subsistence farms and natural forest areas makes Phobjikha a stunningly beautiful and sacred valley. Today this glacial valley is an attraction not just to tourists but also pilgrims and nature-lovers.



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# DAY TO DAY ITNERARY

Besides being the home to the cranes, Phobjikha is also the livelihood base for about 5000 subsistence farmers who have aspirations for economic development. Since the early 1990s, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) initiated an integrated conservation and development program with the sole objective of establishing a strong linkage between environment conservation and the economic welfare of the local people. This approach was instituted because the RSPN felt that an unguided pursuit for economic development by the local community could not only severely undermine the ecological significance of the area but may also adversely affect the local livelihoods.

The annual Black-Necked Crane festival is celebrated at the courtyard of Gangtey Gompa (or nearby) in Phobjikha valley. The festival is an occasion for the locals to rejoice and celebrate the arrival of this endangered and majestic bird which becomes an inseparable part in their daily lives during the winter months. The annual Black-Necked Crane festival is organized to generate awareness and understanding on the importance of conserving the endangered cranes. The festival includes cultural programs such as folk songs and dances (some with black-necked crane themes) and mask dances performed by the local people, crane dances and environmental conservation-themed dramas and songs by school children

By viewing and participating in the festival you reward the community for their continued conservation stewardship. Funds mobilized through the Black-Necked Crane festival and other activities of the committee are deposited in a community owned bank account and managed by the committee for activities of common benefit to all locals.

#### **Day 18 Sun 12 Nov - THIMPHU - 4-5 hrs and stay at the Tashi Yoedling Hotel**

Today we will retrace our path back to Thimphu for an overnight stop en route to Paro.

<http://www.tashiyoedling.com/>

#### **Day 19 Mon 13 Nov - PARO - Drive to Paro – 1.5 hrs,**

After breakfast we will take the short (1.5 hrs) drive back to Paro. The remainder of the day is free to wander into Paro town, take a walk along the river and just take time out to soak up the magic of this extraordinary place.

#### **Day 20 Tue 14 Nov - Depart Paro for Bangkok**

# Inclusions & Exclusions

- Cost of USD\$8,995 includes; (for a Single Supplement add USD\$1,500)
- Services of tour escort, Mike Wood plus local Bhutanese Guides
- Airfare from Bangkok to Paro return with Druk Air
- Accommodation/Camping
- Sleeping bags, sleeping mats
- Most meals
- Bhutan visa
- Local fees
- All transportation
- All entry into site / monuments mentioned in itinerary
- 1 bottle of water per person per day.

Cost does not include

- Soft drinks and alcohol
- Tips
- Airfare to Bangkok or hotel in Bangkok
- Travel insurance

