

# Seeking Happiness: The Kingdom of Bhutan

October 21-November 1, 2024



Featuring: *Dora Ching \*11, Deputy Director, Tang Center for East Asian Art,  
Princeton University*

PRINCETON  
JOURNEYS

Dear Princetonian,

Nestled deep in the Himalayas, between the powers of India and China, lies Bhutan — one of the most beautiful and isolated places on Earth. It is now the last living Vajrayana Buddhist Kingdom, where, during the seventh century, the teachings of the Buddha became the country's state religion. Over the last twelve hundred years these timeless teachings of wisdom and compassion have infused every aspect of society. In Bhutan, the government's official development policy, first articulated by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk, is known as "Gross National Happiness." Facing the daunting challenges of modernization and globalization, Bhutan balances economic development with other values: maintaining the integrity of spiritual and cultural traditions and good governance. The vitality of Bhutan's traditional culture and the purity and beauty of its natural environment make this one of the most unique and appealing countries in the world.

Join us on an adventure from Western Bhutan, home to the capital city of Thimphu and the famous Tiger's Nest monastery, to the East, which is considered the spiritual homeland of this magical country, and where some of its greatest and most active monasteries can be found. Along the way we will explore sites that are off the beaten path, spend time at a local school, receive a blessing from a local nunnery, and meet with NGO representatives to learn about the Gross National Happiness project.

I hope you can join this very special Princeton Journey.

With warm regards,



Bridget St. Clair  
Director, Alumni Education and Travel  
Princeton University



## About Our Study Leader

**Dora C. Y. Ching** \*11, deputy director of the Tang Center for East Asian Art, will serve as Princeton study leader for this journey.



Dr. Ching is a specialist in East Asian art, and her scholarship engages in questions of identity and function in portraiture, the interplay of aesthetics and literati culture in calligraphy, and the transmission of art and ideas along the Silk Road. Before and during her time at the Tang Center, she has been deeply engaged in book editing and publication, with more than a dozen books to her credit as co-editor or managing editor. She is the author of numerous book chapters and articles and has co-curated three major museum exhibitions. In 2021 she published nine volumes on the Buddhist caves in Dunhuang in northwest China and the historic Lo Archive of 1940s photographs of the site. She has taught courses on portraiture and the Silk Road and is developing an art history course on sacred sites in Asia. She has served as a Study Leader on Princeton Journeys trips to China, Japan, Vietnam and Cambodia, and is eager to introduce travelers to the traditional “sacred sites” of Bhutan and their artistic equivalents throughout Asia.

**Tour Cost:** \$9,990

**Single Supplement:** \$2,900  
(subject to availability)



## Itinerary

### October 21-22. Depart the U.S. for Bangkok, Thailand

Fly from the U.S. to Bangkok and cross the International Date Line.

*Novotel Airport Hotel, Bangkok (Meals aloft)*

### October 23. Bangkok →Thimphu, Bhutan

Meet your fellow Princeton Journeys travel companions at the Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport this morning and fly from Bangkok to Paro. Upon arrival, transfer to the capital city of Thimphu and visit the Memorial Chorten, built in memory of the third king of Bhutan and the focus of daily worship for many local Bhutanese. Gather this evening for a welcome dinner at the Taj Tashi Hotel.

*Taj Tashi Hotel (Lunch, Dinner)*

### October 24. Thimphu

Visit the Great Buddha Dordenma, a gigantic bronze and gold gilded Buddha statue that overlooks the entire Thimphu Valley. At 52 meters high, it is one of the largest Buddha statues in the world. Next, observe the process of creating handmade paper from the bark of the daphne bush at the Jungshi Handmade Paper Factory. After lunch, interact with students at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, a vocational school that teaches the 13 traditional Bhutanese arts, including woodcarving, embroidery, painting and statue-making. Dinner this evening is at leisure.

*Taj Tashi Hotel (Breakfast, Lunch)*

### October 25. Thimphu → Punakha

Depart Thimphu this morning on a dazzling overland journey to the eastern town of Punakha. En route, cross Dochula Pass at an altitude of 10,130 feet, where on a clear day one can see the entire Himalayan Range.

Upon arrival, tour the Punakha Dzong, winter residence of the “dratshang” (Central Monk Body). Construction on the current dzong began in 1637 and was completed the following year, when the building was christened “Punghang Dechen Phodrang” (Palace of Great Happiness). Damaged by fire in 1986, the dzong was renovated using traditional building techniques that eschew the use of nails, plans or power tools. For the Bhutanese people, Punakha Dzong is one of the most important sites in the country and arguably the most beautiful monastery in the country.

Conclude the day with a gentle hike through villages and rice paddies to the “Chimi Lhakhang,” or “Temple of the Divine Madman.”

*Dhensa Resort (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

### October 26. Punakha

This morning, drive to Talo, hometown of Bhutan’s queen mothers, and embark on a

beautiful three-mile trail walk from Talo to the village of Nobgang for a chance to experience rural life in Bhutan. After a simple village lunch, continue through the pine forests along the banks of the Punakha River to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten. This Chorten was built by the mother of Bhutan's fifth king to promote peace, harmony and stability in a changing world. The chorten offers commanding views of the upper Punakha Valley.

*For our more ambitious hikers, an additional three-mile hike from Nobgang to Punakha will be available.*

*Dhensa Resort (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

### **October 27. Punakha → Bumthang Valley**

Continue the overland journey to the Bumthang Valley, the cultural and historic heart of the kingdom. Here the valleys are wide open and the mountains have relatively gentle slopes, which give the surroundings a feeling of spaciousness that is unequalled in any other part of Bhutan. The scenic mountain drive will take most of the day with multiple picnic and photo stops. Check into Jakar Mountain Lodge, a small family-run inn with clean rooms and warm hospitality. To celebrate your arrival in Bumthang, enjoy an evening bonfire and traditional music after dinner.

*Jakar Mountain Lodge (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

### **October 28-29. Bumthang Valley**

Spend the next two days exploring the Bumthang Valley, including special visits within the community. Stop at Pema Chöling Nunnery, situated on a windy plateau at the entrance of the Tang Valley, where the resident nuns will perform a private prayer ritual meant to give blessing for a safe journey. Spend time with young students and their teachers at a local elementary school and learn about the uniquely Buddhist curriculum. Experience Bhutan's national sport at an archery tournament and watch as the two teams tease and dance throughout the match.

Stroll through the countryside and visit Kurjey Lhakhang, a monument to the Bhutanese saint Guru Rinpoche. Explore Tamshing Goemba, founded by the great "revealer of treasures," Pema Lingpa. The Bhutanese believe that "terma" (treasures of spiritual or social significance) may be found by a "revealer" and bestow good tidings upon the land. Visit the seventh-century Jambay Lhakhang complex, one of the most important monasteries in the valley, and pay homage at the holy site of Membartsho, or "burning lake," where Pema Lingpa discovered several of Guru Rinpoche's relics. The sanctity of the lake is made evident by the numerous small clay offerings left on the banks by locals.

Join an optional full-day, moderately strenuous hike through villages and fields to the rarely visited Kunzangdrak Monastery. Approximately 100 monks reside at Kunzangdrak and if the timing is right, the group will listen to their chants and the blow of Tibetan horns.

*Jakar Mountain Lodge (2 Breakfasts, 2 Lunches, 2 Dinners)*

### October 30. Bumthang → Paro

After breakfast, depart on a short flight back to Paro. Spend the afternoon exploring Paro's surroundings with a stop at the ancient temple of Kyichu Lhakhang, built by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo in 659 A.D. and restored by the Royal Queen Mother Ashi Kezang Choden Wangchuck in 1968. Check into your hotel and enjoy an evening at leisure.

*Le Méridien Paro, Riverfront (Breakfast, Lunch)*

### October 31. Paro

Today marks the highlight of any trip to Bhutan, a hike to the spectacularly located Tiger's Nest, or Taktsang Monastery, one of the most venerated pilgrimage sites of the Himalayan world. Clinging to a vertical granite cliff 3,000 feet above the valley floor, Taktsang gets its name from the legend that Guru Rinpoche, who first brought Buddhism to Bhutan in the eighth century, flew to this spot on the back of a flying tigress. Enjoy a simple teahouse lunch before returning to Paro for time at leisure. Tonight, we celebrate with a wonderful Bhutanese farewell dinner.

*An optional two-mile uphill hiking extension is available today for more adventurous hikers. On the way, pass hermitages where monks reside in solitude for three years of meditation and self-exploration.*

*Le Méridien Paro, Riverfront (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

### November 1. Paro → Bangkok, Thailand

Fly from Paro to Bangkok for flights home.  
*(Breakfast)*



## **Accommodation**

The accommodation for this tour has been carefully selected by Princeton Journeys and Authentic Asia. While the Taj Tashi Hotel in Thimphu and Le Meridien Paro, Riverfront are luxurious five-star properties with western amenities, the more remote Dhensa Resort in Punakha and Jakar Mountain Lodge in Bumthang are simple family-owned lodges where travelers can expect clean but modest rooms.

**Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport** – This 4-star property is the official hotel of Suvarnabhumi airport. Offering 612 guest rooms with Thai designs, the key focus of the Novotel is convenience. Providing 24-Hour flex check-in and check-out, you have the luxury to plan your stay without worrying about predetermined check-in timings. The hotel features eight restaurants and bars, VOUS spa, a tropical swimming pool and more.

**Taj Tashi Hotel, Thimphu** – Taj Tashi reflects Bhutan’s rich heritage and architecture with a balance of traditional Bhutanese design and contemporary elegance. The five-star Taj has 66 rooms with majestic views of the Thimphu valley and modern comforts, including a luxurious spa, indoor heated pool, elegant meeting facilities and gourmet dining.



**Dhensa Resort, Punakha** – Dhensa’s 24 rooms are set in six cottages, all with private balconies. The spacious interiors are deliberately understated and designed for the modern traveler.

**Jakar Mountain Lodge, Bumthang Valley** – This comfortable and quiet property has attractive external Bhutanese motifs and offers simple, clean accommodation.

### Le Méridien Paro, Riverfront

On the edge of Paro River, this five-star property offers unique views of the Eastern Himalayas and features a luxurious spa, an indoor heated pool, sundeck and a river-facing fitness center with modern equipment.



### ***A note about flights in and out of Bhutan***

*Economy flights on Druk Airlines to and from Bhutan, via Bangkok, are included in the price of your tour.*

*All Druk Air flights depart Bangkok in the very early morning. The exact departure time will be made available by the end of summer 2023. Therefore, we recommend that when booking your international flights, you allow for an extra day/night or two in Bangkok prior to October 23, 2024. Accommodations at the Novotel Airport Hotel in Bangkok on October 22, 2024 are included in the trip price. Should you wish to book additional services in Bangkok or Thailand prior to or after the Bhutan trip, please contact our tour operator, Authentic Asia at: [info@authenticasia.net](mailto:info@authenticasia.net) or 888-263-1170 for assistance.*

*At the end of our tour, the Druk Air flights to Bangkok will arrive in the late afternoon. Please keep in mind that the Druk Air flights are always subject to weather conditions. We therefore do NOT recommend booking a tight connection flight back to the U.S. but rather a late evening or next day flight. Additional details about flights will be distributed to all participants in late summer 2023.*



## Terms and Conditions

**Tour Cost:** \$9,990

**Deposit:** \$2,000 per person (non-refundable)

**Single Supplement:** \$2,900 (subject to availability)

**Reservations and Payments:** To reserve a space, please register online at:

<https://journeys.princeton.edu/booking/start/24-10-22-AUA/tour>

or contact the Princeton Journeys team at 609.258.8686/journeys@princeton.edu. Balance of payment is due four months prior to departure. Personal checks should be made payable to our tour operator, Authentic Asia Tours and Travel.

**Included are:** All accommodations as listed; international flight between Bangkok and Paro in economy class; internal flights in Bhutan in economy class; all meals as listed in the itinerary; tea and coffee with all meals; bottled water with all meals and during all sightseeing; soda and juice drinks with all meals; beer and wine with dinner; all sightseeing and entrance fees; gratuities to guides, drivers, porters and wait staff; Bhutan visa fee; service of a Princeton Journeys tour manager and national guide; lectures by a Princeton study leader.

**Not included are:** U.S. domestic and international airfare in and out of Bangkok; trip cancellation/baggage insurance; excess baggage fees; items of purely personal nature and those not expressly mentioned as included.

**Insurance:** As a service to its travelers, Princeton University automatically provides Princeton Journeys participants traveling internationally\* with basic medical, accident, and evacuation coverage under a group emergency travel protection plan. It is highly recommended that you supplement this basic protection with your own additional coverage, as well as trip cancellation/interruption or baggage coverage. Information on additional insurance will be emailed to you upon receipt of your reservation.

\*Please note, only U.S. residents are covered under the group emergency travel plan. Foreign national travelers should purchase insurance separately.

**Size:** This departure is limited to a maximum of 18 paying participants.

**What to expect:** This trip involves a certain amount of physical activity such as longer and more strenuous uphill hiking at altitude, stair climbing and walking on uneven surfaces.

**Travelers must be in good physical health and able to walk up to four miles a day on uneven surfaces to participate in the tour.**

**Disclaimer:** Princeton University is pleased to facilitate travel opportunities for its alumni and friends through Princeton Journeys. Princeton Journeys works with tour operators to make available interesting and enriching travel opportunities for the Princeton family. Please note that neither the University nor Princeton Journeys conducts tours, nor does either act as an agent for guests interested in tours. Princeton Journeys acts as a facilitator with tour operators, and tour participants contract directly with tour operators to make arrangements for completing travel. Princeton Journeys encourages you to familiarize yourself thoroughly with the tour operator's cancellation and refund policies, and also to investigate available services such as trip cancellation insurance. Neither the University nor Princeton Journeys is responsible for changes to trips or travel arrangements or for losses or additional expenses resulting from or relating to travel. **Princeton Journeys' complete terms, which you are required to agree to before enrolling in a tour, can be found at: [alumni.princeton.edu/connect/princeton-journeys/terms-and-conditions](https://alumni.princeton.edu/connect/princeton-journeys/terms-and-conditions).**

**Cancellation Policy and Refund:** The tour deposit of \$2,000 is non-refundable. The final invoice will be sent 120 days prior to departure and is due upon receipt. Cancellations shall not be effective until they are received in writing and confirmed by Princeton Journeys.

**The following cancellation fees will apply:**

If a written request is received within 120-75 days prior to departure: 50% of the trip price will be refunded.

If a written request is received within 75 —60 days prior to departure: 25% of the trip price will be refunded.

If a written request is received less than 60 days prior to departure no refund shall be issued.

No refund shall be issued after the tour has commenced, or for leaving the tour early. No refunds shall be issued for missed meals, sightseeing or any unused services.

**Responsibility:** Tour participants assume the responsibility to select a tour that is appropriate for his or her abilities and health. Authentic Asia acts only in the capacity of agents for the hotels, airlines, bus and ship lines or owners of contractors providing accommodations, transportation or other services. As a result, all coupons, receipts or tickets are issued subject to the terms and conditions specified by the supplier. By acceptance of tour membership, the participant agrees that neither Authentic Asia nor any of its subsidiaries shall become liable or responsible for personal injury or illness, damage to person or property, loss, delay or irregularity caused by person not controlled by it, such as (without limitation) airlines, bus, and shipping companies, suppliers of accommodations or other services, or resulting from any acts of God, defects in vehicles, strikes, wars, whether declared or otherwise, civil disturbances, medical or customs regulations, acts of terrorism, epidemics, government restrictions, criminal or negligent acts of others, weather, or any other circumstances over which Authentic Asia has no control. Authentic Asia is not responsible for any additional expenses or liability sustained or incurred by the participants as a result of the abovementioned causes.

Tour participant acknowledges receipt of a copy of these Terms and Conditions and signifies acceptance of, and consents to all of the terms and conditions set forth herein, when registering for, or making payments on this tour.