

The longest and most varied of our Bhutanese treks, the Laya Trek offers fantastically diverse scenery, from fertile farmlands and forests, to alpine pastures and high passes, combined with intriguing insights into the culture and way of life in the remote rural areas we pass through. Starting from Paro, we soon leave the villages behind and emerge above the tree line to high pastures surrounded by the icy peaks on Bhutan's frontier with Tibet. The trek passes beneath the Kingdom's most impressive peaks, where we come across the lone fortress of Lingshi Dzong, standing guard over the old route to Tibet. We now have several passes to cross, among them 4,900m Shinje Pass, the high point of the trek with probably the best mountain views yet. In among these isolated valleys there are small villages and, if we are lucky, we may see the sheep-like bharal (blue sheep) or rare takin, a hoofed deer-like mammal and the national animal of Bhutan.

Reaching Laya, one of the highest villages in Bhutan, we have a rest day to enjoy quiet strolls and perhaps meet some of the villagers, who are very open and welcoming to visitors. After Laya, we follow the course of the Mo Chu River, sometimes high above its gorge, or gently winding through its forested slopes. At Gasa Tshachu enjoy a welcome bath in its hot springs, before the final stage of the trek brings us to Punakha where we enjoy a morning of sight-seeing before our afternoon drive to Thimphu where we spend time taking in the cultural sights of Bhutan's capital.

• **Land-only prices:**

The cost of flights are less predictable than they used to be. Airlines now request full payment upfront. As a result, we will quote you a land-only cost, and quote separately for the cheapest flights we can find at the time of your booking. We will, however, require full payment for the flights prior to booking them. If you prefer to search for alternative flights yourself, we can sell you the trek at the land-only price.

• **Important note – minimum numbers:**

Before booking flights, please note that this trip requires a minimum of 4 trekkers before we can guarantee the departure at the advertised price. Please note that should you decide to book your own flights, it is essential that you check with the Community Action Treks office to ensure that the departure is guaranteed before committing financially to any flights or travel arrangements.

OUTLINE ITINERARY

**** The dates for this trip are dependent on the flights in and out of Paro. Flights into Bhutan are operated by Druk Air, who do not release their flight schedules until fairly close to each trekking season. Flights operate between Kathmandu and Paro, and between Delhi and Paro, but neither service is daily. Consequently, NO international flights should be booked prior to checking dates with the Community Action Treks office, as it may be necessary to reschedule the dates, to spend extra time in Delhi or Kathmandu, or to re-route to fit in with the Druk Air flights.**

**This itinerary currently fits into the Kathmandu – Paro schedule:
Flights Kathmandu to Paro are currently on Thursdays, and returning on Sundays.**

Walking and journey times are approximate

- Day 1 Arrive Kathmandu or Delhi ****
Transfer to your hotel in the city.
- Day 2 Fly to Bhutan**
Transfer to the airport for the short flight to Bhutan, which if the weather is clear may give wonderful views of the Himalaya. As the aircraft enters the Paro valley, look down and you may see the Paro Dzong overlooking Paro Chu (river) with the Ta Dzong, a watch tower which is now the National Museum. After completing the airport formalities you will be met by your local representative and then we drive to our hotel. Rest of the day free to explore Paro.
- Day 3 Paro**
Today's full day sightseeing in Paro valley includes visits to Ta Dzong, built in the 17th Century, as a watch tower to defend Paro Dzong and valley. This fortress was later converted into the National Museum in 1967 and is filled with antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons and Bhutan's renowned postage stamps. Below Ta Dzong, is fascinating Rinpung Dzong, meaning 'fortress of the heap of jewels' which has an interesting history. In the afternoon we visit Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the oldest and most sacred shrines of Bhutan. Overnight at the hotel in Paro.
- Day 4 Paro – Shana (17 km, 5-6 hours)**
The trek starts from Drukgyel Dzong (2580m) with a short downhill walk on a wide trail. The trail climbs gently through well maintained rice terraces and fields of millet. The route later enters an area of apple orchards and forests. Soon the valley widens, and we reach the army post of Gunitsawa (2810m). This is the last stop before Tibet. The trail continues up to 2870m, just beyond Sharma Zampa, where there are several good camping places in meadows surrounded by trees.
- Day 5 Shana – Soi Thangthangkha (20 km, 7-8 hours)**
The trail again follows the Pa Chu (Paro river), ascending and descending through pine, oak and spruce forests. After crossing a bridge to the left bank of the river, we stop for a hot lunch. Then we continue along the river, climbing upwards through rhododendron forests, and crossing the river once more before reaching our campsite (3750m).
- Day 6 Soi Thangthangkha – Jangothang (19km, 7-8 hours)**
The path ascends for a while until we reach the army camp. We then follow the river above the tree line, enjoying stunning views of the surrounding peaks. Hot lunch is served at a yak herder's camp. A short walk from here into the valley takes us to our campsite at Jangothang (4040 m). From here, the views of Chomolhari and Jitchu Drake are superb.
- Day 7 Rest day at Jangothang**
Enjoy a leisurely and relaxing day at this scenic spot, enjoying a superb view of the south face of Chomolhari and the ruined dzong.
- Day 8 Jangothang – Lingshi (18km, 7-8 hours)**
The trail follows the stream for half an hour and crosses the bridge to the right bank. We now start our climb up to the first ridge, enjoying breathtaking views of Chomolhari, Jitchu Drake and Tserimgang. The trail then takes us across a fairly level valley floor, until the climb up to Nyele-la pass (4700m). We descend gradually from the pass to our campsite at Lingshi (4000m), enjoying a panoramic view of the mountain peaks and Lingshi Dzong as we walk.
- Day 9 Lingshi – Chebisa (10km, 5-6 hours)**
We continue on the trail past Lingshi Dzong, perched on its hilltop, enjoying exhilarating

views of green hills, the winding river and magnificent peaks as we walk. It is an easy day, and a pleasant walk through villages and yak herders' camps. After lunch, a short walk takes us to Chebisa village, where we camp by the side of a stream (3850m).

**Day 10 Chebisa – Shoumuthang
(17km, 6-7 hours)**

Today begins with a stiff climb of nearly four hours up a ridge to Gubu-la pass (4500m). We descend from the pass through rhododendrons to our lunch place. We cross the stream after lunch, and continue along the up and down path, through rhododendron forests and yak herders' camps, occasionally sighting flocks of blue sheep as we walk. Tonight's campsite is at an altitude of 4250m.

**Day 11 Shoumuthang – Robluthang
(18km, 6-7 hours)**

The trek starts with a climb up to Jari-la pass (4700m). We descend from here to Tasharijathang valley, the summer grazing ground of the rare Himalayan takin (Bhutan's national animal). We may have to ford the stream here, as the footbridge is frequently washed away. After crossing to the left bank of the stream, the trail ascends to Robluthang (4200m) where we set up our camp for the night.

**Day 12 Robluthang – Limithang
(19km, 7-8 hours)**

We start the day with a long climb up to Shinje-la pass (4900m), enjoying stunning mountain views from the path as we catch our breath. After crossing the pass we descend to Limithang. The path is quite narrow, and we may have to ford the stream again, getting wet on the way! The last part of today's trek is rather a scramble down a steep path, with the compensation of splendid views of Gangchenta peak along the way. Tonight we camp at 4100m on flat ground above the river in a forested area, with Gangchenta peak towering directly above us to the north.

**Day 13 Limithang – Laya
(10km, 4-5 hours)**

In the morning we wake to a superb view of Gangchenta peak in front of our camp. The walk to Laya is very pleasant with wonderful views along the way. We pass through a damp forest, filled with moss and singing birds. We set up camp on arrival at Laya village, the second highest settlement in the country, at 3800m.

Afternoon rest at Laya

Today we explore the village and environs. You can go and visit any of the houses around. Traditional Bhutanese hospitality is extended even to a perfect stranger, and a cup of tea and chang (an alcoholic drink) is always offered. The people in this village are very interesting, especially the women, whose plain black yak wool garments are set off by elaborate necklaces and conical bamboo hats

decorated with turquoise & silver ornaments. In the evening, witness a cultural program of dances performed by village girls by the camp fire, and enjoy the local alcohol (ara and chang, brewed from barley) if you have a strong stomach.

**Day 14 Laya – Chamsa
(19km, 8-9 hours)**

We descend from Laya to the army camp at the side of the Mo Chu (Mother river of Punakha), and then walk alongside the river till reaching a bridge. After crossing the bridge, the track winds up and down through juniper and fir forests. We camp in the forest at Chamsa (3800m).

**Day 15 Chamsa – Gasa Tshachu
(14km, 6-7 hours)**

After a 30 minute walk over flat land to Bele-la pass, it's downhill all the way to Gasa Tshachu. We take lunch at Gasa village (2700m), afterwards visiting the village and Gasa Dzong. The Dzong was built in the 17th century by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, to protect the valley against Tibetan invaders. We then descend to Gasa Tshachu (hot spring), where we set up our camp (2200m)

Day 16 Gasa Tshachu – Damji and drive to Punakha (6-7 hours)

The path winds up and down through heavily forested areas where you can see many wild orchids. Take care, as there are leeches too! Our path leads through heavy forest, following the course of the Mo Chu river, till reaching the road head at Damji. Etho Metho transport will be waiting here to drive us along the valley to Punakha, 20 km. down the road. Overnight at the hotel in Punakha.

Day 17 Punakha – Thimphu

Morning sightseeing in the Punakha and Wangduephodrang valleys visiting Punakha Dzong and local market. Afternoon drive to Thimphu. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu.

Day 18 Thimphu

Today tour Thimphu, visiting the following as time permits: National Memorial Chorten, Tashichhodzong, National Library, Institute for Zorig Chusum (Bhutanese arts and crafts school), National Institute of Traditional Medicine (outside only), Handicrafts Emporium, Folk Heritage and National Textile Museums. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu.

Day 19 Fly to Kathmandu or Delhi **

After breakfast, drive to Paro airport for flight to Kathmandu or Delhi. Transfer to hotel.

Day 20 Depart Nepal or India **

Transfer to the airport for return flight. Extra days in Kathmandu or Delhi, or extensions in Nepal or India can be arranged if you wish once the Druk Air schedule has been released.

Important Note: Whilst we expect that the trek will run as per the itinerary, participants should accept that there is a possibility of changes being necessary subject to local conditions.

The Price Includes:

- Return scheduled flights between Kathmandu/Delhi ** and Paro
- Airport transfers in Nepal/India** and Bhutan
- Accommodation for 2 nights in hotel in Kathmandu/Delhi** in room with shower and wc and inclusive of breakfast
- Participation in trek as detailed, inclusive of full board, transportation to/from start/end of trek, camping equipment (not sleeping bags) guide and porter services (15kg load per trekker), trek permit and national park fees
- Hotel accommodation in Bhutan as per itinerary

Not Included:

- International airfares
- Meals other than breakfast in Kathmandu/Delhi**
- Nepal/India and Bhutan Airport taxes (allow approximately £25)
- Nepalese or Indian** visa (Nepal: Multiple entry tourist visa: £35 for 30 days validity, Indian transit visa approx £26)
- Bhutan visa (allow approximately £40)
- Bhutan Tourism Fee (allow approximately £7)
- Drinks, telephone calls, laundry, souvenirs and other such personal expenses
- Travel insurance
- Tips

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