



# BHUTAN: NARO SIX PASS TREK



*This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.*



*On Nyile La (4890m) with Jitchu Drake (6989m)*

- **An exciting new route crossing six high passes**
- **Two nights at Chomolhari base camp**
- **Highest pass Yale La at 4950m**
- **A challenging journey through remote country**
- **Excellent acclimatisation schedule**

## **Bhutan**

Mystery and legend have surrounded the tiny kingdom of Bhutan for centuries. Its steep mountains and remote forested valleys are scattered with holy places of deep mystical importance where the founders of Tibetan Buddhism have left their traces. Since the borders were opened to tourists in 1974, a tightly controlled tourism policy has allowed a very limited number of visitors to enter the country each year at a high cost price with a proportion of the income going towards government aid, enabling each visitor to make a personal contribution to Bhutan's expanding health and education programmes.

The Wangchuk monarchy ruled Bhutan from 1907 until March 2008 when King Wangchuk initiated the formation of a two party parliamentary democracy with elections. Both the ruling party the 'Bhutan Harmony Party' and the opposition, the 'People's Democratic Party' support the monarchy, and will continue to try to protect the fragile balance between the nation's spiritual heritage and modern economic development.

### **Trip summary**

After two acclimatisation day walks from Paro, we head up a valley towards Chomolhari (7314m), Bhutan's second highest peak and camp for two nights beneath its snow clad slopes with time for a high foray. Now better acclimatized, we cross Nyile La (4870m) and Yale La (4950m), two tough days. Leaving the traditional trekking routes behind, we head off on an old yak herders' trail to cross another four passes and emerge several days later on the final stages of the Druk Path Trek before descending to Thimpu.

A sustained and atmospheric trek with varied terrain and magnificent views from the high passes. An extra acclimatisation walk from Paro at the start of the trip is a feature of the care taken with our acclimatising schedule.

### **Trek Grade**

With the crossing of six high passes and consecutive longish days, the Naro Trek is fairly demanding and is at the upper end of the 'Steady Plus' trip grade. It will seem more like 'Tough' if you don't start the trek with a good level of fitness.

### **On trek**

We are supported by horses and a cooking and camp team. Tents, food and baggage accompany us and we carry only what we need for the day: camera, water bottle, spare clothing, waterproofs etc. A typical day starts early with a steaming mug of tea. Packing is followed by breakfast in the mess tent and we are usually away early in order to catch the best weather. We stop for a picnic lunch and usually arrive in camp by mid afternoon. Dinner is usually about 7pm and 'trekkers bedtime' is seldom later than 9pm.

### **Accommodation**

Outside of the trek we stay in comfortable, traditional hotels with ensuite rooms. Whilst trekking we camp in 2 person tents.

### **Food**

Whilst in Bhutan, all meals are included. In towns you will be asked to pay for your own drinks. Note that in Bhutan there are very few 'extras' to pay for.

### **Health and hygiene**

We have an excellent record of staying fit and well, and the local food is delicious. The key seems to be

- Avoid drinking any untreated water, even when cleaning your teeth
- Be scrupulous about washing your hands before eating.



*Bhutanese national dress*

### **Altitude**

Above 3000m, the air is thinner, the pressure lower and there is less oxygen available in the atmosphere. Acclimatisation is the process by which the body adapts to these conditions. The key to acclimatisation is a good itinerary with a gradual initial height gain, walking at a slow and steady pace, and increasing fluid intake – drinking at least 4 litres a day is advisable above 3000m. Many people have some minor side effects from altitude, such as headache, nausea or general

lassitude. The optional use of 'Diamox' has proved useful for some people, as this drug can reduce these symptoms. You will be given more information on 'Diamox' with your Final Information, between 8 and 10 weeks before departure.

### **Transport**

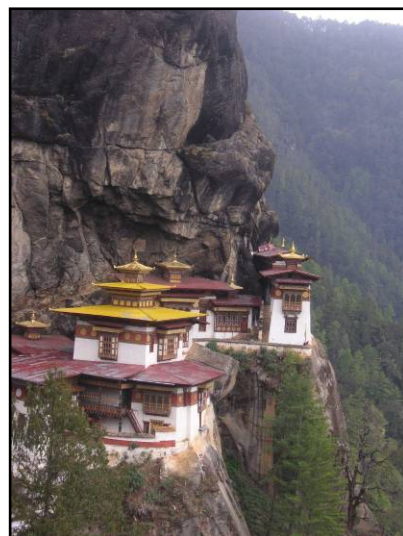
Whilst in Bhutan we travel by private bus or jeep.

### **Climate**

In April/May and October/November, the weather is often fine, and when the sun shines it can be very hot. Mornings are often clear, with cloud coming in later in the day. Rain is possible, likely to fall as snow on the high passes. Temperatures may drop below freezing at the high camps.

### **Visas**

All visitors to Bhutan must have a visa approved prior to arriving in the kingdom, which must be paid for in advance (currently US\$20). High Places make the application on your behalf and we will send you more information before departure.



*Takstang Monastery*  
Photo Louise Ready

### **Tipping**

There is a custom to tip the crew at the end of the trek.

Last year approx US\$100pp covered all tips.

You may also have some outdoor gear that you are willing to donate at the end of the trek – eg woollen socks are difficult for locals to obtain and are always well received.

### **What our clients say.....**

The comments below follow our inaugural Naro Trek in Oct 09 when we had originally planned to follow a different route back to Thimpu. Due to bridges being damaged by floods, this proved impassable and our group pioneered this new route led by Dolay and Phuntso. In 2010 we returned to recce the route again and were thrilled with the quality of the route which we have successfully run several times since.

*“A great trip, Bhutan is a wonderful place, and the new route of the trek must have been far more interesting and exciting than the original. We went over 6 passes in 5 days and got some wonderful views that we would otherwise not have seen.”* Bob Haskins Naro Trek Oct 09

*“The variation route in Bhutan was a great success. It is longer and tougher than the standard route back from Lingshi, but it is scenically of the highest order and interesting throughout. I have never been along the standard route, but we saw it disappear down into the valley above Shodu and it is clearly very different in character compared to the new route which is much more varied, higher, open and crosses another four passes (the highest at around 4600m). The new route has apparently only been opened for the last four weeks (because of the problems caused by destroyed bridges above Thimpu. It was not known to the trekking guides but is well-used by horsemen and yak herders. We think our group was only the second organised trek to cross the new route. Our leader Dolay was excellent throughout. Thank you very much for negotiating the new-route option - a very good outcome indeed.”*

Bill & Jane Stephens Naro Trek Oct 09

'Would you recommend High Places to others?' "Yes' 'Why?'

*“The guides and the food are always excellent – and that’s a head start on a trek”*

Phil Duke Bhutan Naro Trek Oct 09

## DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

*This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.*

This trip is 17 days ex Kolkata. Depending on schedules, it may be possible to join the trip via Bangkok, Kathmandu or Delhi. Flights to/from Paro can be delayed due to bad weather, so you should avoid arranging direct connections between flights.

DAY 1 Arrive Kolkata. Hotel.

DAY 2 Paro. A short flight to Bhutan to arrive in Paro (2280m). From the moment of arrival in Paro it is clear that Bhutan is different to anywhere else - local people resplendent in national dress welcome us outside an airport building with intricately carved woodwork in the traditional style.  
In the afternoon we will visit Ta Dzong, an ancient watch tower, which now houses the National Museum and contains art relics, thangka paintings and natural history, followed by a visit to Paro Rimping Dzong. Dzongs are large monasteries and district administrative centres which in days gone by were strategic forts. Hotel. (B,L,D)

DAY 3 Paro. Towering above the Paro Valley at 2900m on precarious rock ledges lies Taktsang Monastery: the Tiger's Lair. A hike up to the monastery through shady forest acts as great acclimatisation for the trek. Hotel (B,L,D)

DAY 4 Paro. Another walk will assist acclimatisation for the trek and today we head up to Jele Dzong (3436m), an impressive fort surrounded by prayer flags. From here there are great views of the Paro valley as well as towards Chomolhari & beyond. 7 hours return. (B,L,D)

DAY 5 Shana. The trek begins. A short drive brings us to the end of the road at Drukgyal Dzong (2580m). While the horsemen and staff are loading the horses we walk up to the ruins of Drukgyal Dzong. Built in 1647, the dzong (fortress/monastery) was destroyed by accidental fire. Its ruins were left as an evocative reminder of the great victories it was built to commemorate.

Our trek to Shana follows the Pa Chu (Paro River) and passes cultivated fields, traditional Bhutanese farmhouses and tiny picturesque villages. The forests are alive with numerous birds and brightly coloured butterflies. We camp at Shana (2790m) 17 km, 5-6 hours, 350m ascent. (B,L,D)

DAY 6 Thangthangka. This morning the trail follows the river through a forested area with scattered farm houses. We climb steadily through oak, rhododendron, bamboo & fern, passing a junction where a path leads north over the Tremo La to Tibet. In former days, traders returning this way from Tibet were taxed in salt at a bridge just beyond Shana but the border is now closed.



*Chomolhari from Thangthangka*

Our camp is in a meadow at Thangthangka, 3520m. A long day, made more strenuous due to the altitude. 20 km, 7-8 hours, 770m ascent. (B,L,D)

DAY 7 Jangothang. The trail slowly leaves the forest line and gradually climbs into a beautiful valley, passing Tegethang, a winter home of the yak herdsman. Lots of yaks will be seen today before we arrive at Chomolhari's base, Jangothang. Chomolhari (7315m) overlooks the camp and visible nearby are the ruins of an old dzong which used to guard Bhutan against Tibetan invasions. 4040m. 19 km, 7 hours, 480m ascent. (B,L,D)

DAY 8 Jangothang. A rest day - our bodies need to acclimatise and catch up with the height gain of the last two days. There are a number of good side trips from camp – you can walk easily up the valley towards Chomolhari, climb the ridge behind camp to a high pedestal, or walk to a beautiful high lake with very fine views of Chomolhari 'Goddess of the Holy Mountain' & Jitchu Drake (6989m). Alternatively, recline in your tent and enjoy superb views from there! (B,L,D)

DAY 9 Campsite near Lingshi. Our route today crosses Nyile La (4890m), 'Sleepy Pass', a challenging climb still dominated by Chomolhari and Jitchu Drake but with views of Tserim Gang (6526m) to the north and Gancheta ('Great Tiger Mountain', 6840m) to the east. In these high altitudes we hope to see bearded vultures and Himalayan griffon as well as blue sheep. From the pass we descend to reach our camp (4090m) – the yaks tend to travel faster than us so with any luck there will be a welcome brew ready at camp. 18km, 7-8 hours+, 840m ascent. (B,L,D).

DAY 10 Olethang. Today we cross the Yale La (4820m). An early start is needed as it's a long day with a lot of climbing. Our gentle trail along the Mo Chu River is initially dominated by Lingshi Dzong behind us, which recedes in the distance as we climb. After 3 hours we cross the river, then another 2 hours at a slow and steady pace should see us on the pass enjoying a splendid panorama including Chomolhari, Gancheta, Tserim Kang and many many others. In snow this crossing may be tougher for the horses than for us. A steady, never too steep descent leads past slopes where blue sheep graze and we follow the Thimpu Chu on a good track to Shodu. Now our route diverges from the river and the main trail and heads off to a camp at Olethang (4160m.) 8 hours+. 940m ascent. (B,L,D)

DAY 11 Gangla Yumtsho. We begin with a gentle but steady three hour climb following an old yak herders' trail to reach Ledi La (4700m), our third pass. Dropping into the remote valley beyond, we look out for blue sheep and himalayan griffon as our horses carefully pick their way through steep ground to reach the valley floor. We follow the shoreline of a beautiful blue lake on a good trail which then threads its way beneath towering cliffs to reach our next camp by a yak herders' shelter at Gangla Yumtsho (3800m). A varied and satisfying day. 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)



*Guide Kezang with blue sheep beyond*

- DAY 12 Tshosum. Following the valley downstream from our camp, we cross the Tango Chari Chu, thankfully on a new bridge, the old version being little more than a wobbly plank. The trail climbs across another forested ridge to drop into the next valley. A slow climb now leads through pine forest and over scree to emerge above the tree line at the three high lakes of Tshosum (4000m). (6-7 hours)
- DAY 13 Labana. A steady climb leads to Yusa La (4380m) and we drop down over rocky terrain then climb again to Dung Tsho La (4300m) to join the Druk Path Trek - the traditional route between Paro and Thimpu. We camp a little further on, either by a sheltered lake or at Labana (4200m). 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 14 Thimpu. The final pass is Labana La at 4200m from which Gangar Punsum and the rest of the Bhutan Himalaya can be seen. From here we descend to Phajoding Monastery and Thimpu. Approx 5 -6 hours. Hotel. (B,L,D)
- DAY 15 Paro. Time to do some sightseeing in Thimpu - there are many interesting places to visit. We drive back to Paro in the late afternoon (2 hour drive). Hotel. (B,L,D)
- DAY 16 Depart Paro, hoping for final Himalayan views from the plane – try to get a seat with a mountain view. Overnight Kolkata. (B)
- DAY 17 Depart Kolkata or continue with your own arrangements. (B)



*Gentians.* Photo Phil Duke

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