

BHUTAN

A Trip to the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon
for Body, Mind and Soul

with Bhutan expert Mr. Gregor Verhufen
and Taichi Master Mrs. Gisa Anders

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Vom 01.09. – 15.09.2019



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TRAVEL DETAILS

ITENERARY

- Experience Bhutan with a genuine expert
- Tai Chi and meditation with Gisa Anders
- „Tiger Nest“ – the most beautiful monastery of the Himalayas



The Kingdom of Bhutan, also known as Druk Yul, “land of the thunder dragon”, is a unique treasure in the Himalayas, an unspoilt Shangri La to be discovered on your journey.

World-famous is the monastery Taktsang, which clings like a miracle of architecture to a steep cliff. Other highlights of this trip are, for example, the monastic castles of Punakha or the impressive fortress of Paro. Many other Dzongs (monastic castles) and monasteries are a sign of the omnipresent Buddhism. Some hikes and treks will give you a chance to discover the untouched nature of Bhutan as well as many small off the beaten track villages and monasteries.

In Bhutan you will be looked after by a small, high-quality agency with top-class service and a high degree of flexibility. Many small items of the program, that will make your trip unforgettable, cannot even be listed here.

Your guide Gregor Verhufen is one of the country's best experts and knows how to convey the unique culture of Bhutan in a very personal way.

Your daily sightseeing programme is supplemented with regular (as far as possible) Tai Chi and Ch'i-Kung lessons held by Mrs. Gisa Anders.



TAICHI IN THE HIMALAYAS

Taichi – the art of reconciling body and mind, the gentle way to a better body awareness.

Tai Chi Chuan is an art of movement that aims at harmonizing Yin and Yang. Through the gentle, calm and graceful movements the Ch'i, the life energy, becomes activated and is distributed to the various organ systems through the meridians, the energy channels of the body. The name Tai Chi Chuan is composed of Tai Chi and Chuan. Tai Chi is a term from the ancient Chinese philosophy of Taoism, which means as much as the sublime final or supreme law. Chuan – literally fist – means movement system or martial arts.

INTENDED ITENERARY

(Subject to alterations)

1st - 2nd Day: Arrival in Nepal

Departure from Germany in the evening and arrival in Kathmandu in the late afternoon of the 2nd day.



Your hotel is located in the middle of the Tibetan quarter of Kathmandu, close to the gigantic Bouddhanath Stupa. The stupa towers over the surrounding houses. For Buddhists, it is one of the holiest places in the Himalayas. You can reach the stupa in a few steps and savour the evening atmosphere

around the stupa. Join the flow of the Pilgrims who circle the stupa in clockwise direction.

If possible, in the evening first Tai Chi lesson with Gisa Anders.

3rd Day: Arrival in Bhutan

Today you will fly from Kathmandu to Paro and will be welcomed in the traditional Bhutanese fashion.

The flight is an experience by itself. The highest mountains in the world are lined up in front of you and if the weather is nice, the views of the mountains are uniquely beautiful.



After a warm welcome at Paro airport, you will be transferred to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Over-night-stay at a hotel in Thimphu.

After spending the day in Nepal's bustling capital, the relaxed pace of life in Bhutan's metropolis is all the more noticeable. In the afternoon you will visit the National Memorial Chorten and the Trashi Chhoe Dzong, the impressive monastic castle and seat of government as well as the supreme monk body.

The beautiful Memorial Chorten was initiated by the great master Dungse Rinpoche who passed away recently.

Overnight stay for the next two nights in Thimphu.

4th Day: Thimphu – City of Museums and Monasteries

You will visit selected sights in Thimphu, including the Buddha Point (one of the world's tallest Buddha statue with Buddha Shakyamuni in the earth call gesture). Other program items include i.a. the Changangkha Temple and the Zilukha Nunnery with a beautiful view over the Thimphu Valley.



5th Day: Punakha – Headquarters of the Kings

Drive to Punakha und Wangdi Phodrang. (90 km/3 hours) over the Dochu La Pass (3.050m).

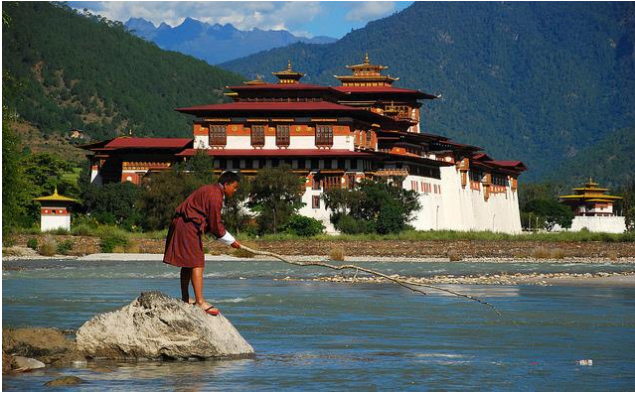
At Dochu La, 108 chortens are prominent. The pass is known for its splendid views. Weather permitting, you will be able to see the spectacular mountains of the Himalayas right up to Tibet.



The road winds through rice terraces into the green and subtropical valley of Punakha (1,400m).

The late afternoon is busy with a visit to the imposing Punakha Dzong, dating back to the 17th century. Picturesquely located on an island at the confluence of the Mo Chhu (Mother River) and Pho Chhu (Father River), the Dzong is the only Bhutan castle built in the valley and not on a dominant hill.

A number of smaller and larger lhakhangs (worship halls) run through the entire construction, which serves the monks as a winter residence. The castle is of particular importance since the five kings of the current Wang chuck dynasty were crowned here. They recognized Punakha as the capital of their empire for a long time and later used the Dzong as winter residence after Thimphu was declared capital.



Outside of Punakha, a small hike through small villages leads to the Chimi Lhakhang Temple which is surrounded by rice fields and was dedicated to the "divine madman" Drukpa Künleg. The temple is presumed to be a fertility symbol, and Gregor Verhufen can tell you many interesting stories and explain the background.

Further down the valley you will reach the ruins of Wangdi Phodrang Dzong towering over the Puna Tsang River. Unfortunately, the Dzong burnt down to its foundations in the summer of 2012. The king, however, has promised to use all his energy for the reconstruction of the Dzong. With a bit of luck you can partake of how the craftsmen rebuild the Dzong in their traditional way.

Overnight-stay in Wangdi Phrodang or Punakha.

6th Day: Drive through the Black Mountains

From the Punakha Valley, a road leads through narrow ravines into the heart of the Black Mountains. In the dense forests live many monkeys, but even bears and tigers are said to have been sighted there.

After about 3 hours, you turn off the Bhutan Highway onto the small road to Gangtey (about 2,900m) until you reach the picturesque high valley of Phobjikha.



Between November and March, the valley is the winter resting place of the rare black-necked cranes that come there from the Tibetan highlands to escape the harsh winter.

The centre of the valley is the old Nyingma Gangtey Monastery which is famous for its murals and filigree woodcarvings.

Overnight-stays for the next two nights in the valley of Phobjikha.

7th Day: The Valley of Phobjikha

The wide valley is a place of silence and peace. The potato is the main crop of this remote valley. As you travel at the time of the potato harvest, you will meet many of the farming families in the fields.

Also planned is a short hike in the wide valley bottom and a visit to the Black-necked Crane information centre.



8th Day: Return Journey to Thimphu

From Gangtey, you retrace your steps and return to Thimphu on the Bhutan Highway (about 5 hours).

From the already mentioned Dochu La Pass, you can hike up to the Loungchotse Monastery above Dochu La pass. A beautiful track through rhododendron forests brings you way up to the monastery at 3550 m with outstanding views and Dochu La far below you.

The higher you climb, the better and further the views to the north, far over the valley of Punakha towards the Tibetan border.

At the Gompa, you can put up prayer flags in a small ceremony. After descending and returning to the Dochu La Pass, the road leads to Thimphu, the living capital of Bhutan, in about an hour.



9th Day: Thimphu

A day in Thimphu to immerse yourself in the flow of the city and experience life in Bhutan very close.

Highly recommendable is the visit of the Zorig Chusum, the school of the 13 traditional arts of Bhutan. Here the finest Bhutanese craftsmanship is taught. You can meet the young artists and purchase high quality authentic works of art along the way. Additionally, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the meaningful words on the walls throughout the entire site.

10th Day: Into the Valley of Haa

From Thimphu the road leads back to the Paro valley. A few kilometres before Paro, you take the turnoff into the Haa Valley over the Chele La Pass.

Chele La is the highest motorable road in Bhutan at 3,980m. If the weather is clear, wide views open up to Bhutan's holy mountain, the Jomolhari. Looking west, the view sweeps across Tibet and Sikkim to the third highest mountain of the earth, the Kanchenjunga.

Haa was a restricted area until 2002 and even today very few visitors make their way into this magnificent valley.

The Haa Valley is characterized by its three sacred mountains, which represent Boddhisattvas (deities) who are supposed to protect the valley. Cultural centres of the valley are the temples Lhakhang Karpo and Lhakhang Nakpo (the white and the black temple). This is where the heart of rural Bhutan beats, and it is easy to get in touch with the inhabitants of the valley.

Overnight-stay in Haa.

11th Day: Return to Paro

After breakfast return via the Chele La Pass to Paro (about 3 hours).

Below the pass and already in the Paro valley, an approximately two-hour hike to the Kila nunnery starts. Kila was built high above the valley in the steep rock walls and is home to 32 nuns. At this sacred place in the mountains time seems to have stopped. Up here you feel far away from any modern civilization.

After another hour, you will be back on the road to Paro, which can be reached in about 1.5 hours.

The next 3 nights: overnight-stays in Paro.

12th-13th Day: Paro

The Paro Dzong shows some beautiful mandalas and carvings. The Ta Dzong (mid-17th century), formerly the watchtower of the castle, is located further up and now houses the National Museum with a significant and excellent collection of historic Thangkas. The rest of the day is spent visiting other temples in Paro. If possible, you receive an audience with one of the Rinpoches of the Paro valley.

The following day you will visit Taktsang, the world famous "Tiger's Nest". Here Padmasambhava appeared in the 8th century as his emanation guru Dorje Drolö. Taktsang is considered to be the holiest place in Bhutan and has been visited by countless llamas of the Himalayas.



The religious meaning results from Guru Rinpoche's meditation cave. The cave itself is not accessible, but the place has a very special spiritual power. And the views from the monastery courtyard on the valley of Paro and up to the mountains of Tibet are beyond words.

An ascent of about an hour, which starts at an altitude of 2500 m, leads you through forests up to 2800 m to a view point, from which you can see the most famous monastery of Bhutan, Taktsang (also called Tiger's Nest). The monastery itself can be reached after a further additional hour. The scene of the Sanctuary clinging to the cliffs at almost 3100 is overwhelming.

Afterwards you will visit the Kyichu Lhakhang Temple, which was built in the 7th century by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo and is one of the oldest in Bhutan. Kyichu Lhakhang was for many years the home monastery of the famous teacher Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and a small museum dedicated to the Rinpoche was inaugurated a few years ago.

14th-15th Day: Return Flight to Kathmandu

In the morning, short transfer to the airport and return flight to Kathmandu. Please check in early to get a window seat on the right side. The views of the highest mountains on earth are stunning.

If time permits in Kathmandu, hike up the steep stairs to Swayambhu Stupa (UNESCO Heritage Site). Here you can enjoy a 360 ° panoramic view over Kathmandu and towards the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas.



Transfer back to Boudhanath for last minute shopping and dinner at one of the small restaurants around Boudhanath Stupa.

This Evening or the following morning, you will commence your return flight back to Germany. Arrival in the early morning or late afternoon of day 15

INCLUDED SERVICES

Economy Class flight Frankfurt Kathmandu - Frankfurt • Flights Kathmandu – Paro –

Kathmandu in Economy Class • Required transfers • Accommodation in a double room in middle class hotels in Bhutan, in Kathmandu Guesthouse / Hotel in the Tibetan area of Boudhanath • Full board in Bhutan, breakfast in Kathmandu • Program according to itinerary • Entrance fees • Tour guide Gregor Verhufen; if possible daily tai chi lessons (each about 1 hour in the morning and evening) by Gisa Anders • visa for Bhutan • NEUE WEGE information

NOT INCLUDED SERVICES

Visa costs for Nepal • Beverages • Lunch and dinner in Nepal - Personal expenses such as gratuities, phone costs, souvenirs • other, not listed services • Rail & Fly-Ticket: € 50 • Single Room Charge € 395

DATES AND PRICES

Travel-No.	from	to	Price in €
9BTS2101	01.09.18	15.09.18	€ 5.490

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

Minimum 10, maximum 20

TRAVEL PERIOD

15 days

TOUR GUIDE

Gisa Anders

Gisa Anders has been working since 1986 as a Tai Chi teacher in the region of Frankfurt and Bad Nauheim. Since 2006 she has been running her own Tai Chi and Ch'i-Kung Schools in Frankfurt and Bad Nauheim; since 2009 she also teaches Tai Chi and Ch'i-Kung at the MEDIAN-Kaiserberg clinic in Bad Nauheim. www.taichi-frankfurt-badnauheim.de

Gregor Verhufen

Gregor Verhufen is a Buddhist, studied Tibetologist, Indian art historian and religious scholar. He was in Tibet i.a. engaged in the development and evaluation of Tibetan historical texts. Gregor is on the board of the German Bhutan Himalaya Society and works very closely with the Bhutanese National Library in Thimphu since 1996.

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