

How to Plan the Perfect Luxury Trip to Bhutan, According to a Travel Expert

The tiny Himalayan kingdom is celebrating 50 years of tourism in 2025.

By [Mark Lakin](#) | Published on December 7, 2024



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Picturesque view of Thimphu, Bhutan's capital. PHOTO: ANDREW STRANOVSKY PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

This year marks 50 years since the Kingdom of Bhutan began welcoming international tourism. With a population of approximately 800,000 people and only one main highway snaking through its mountains and valleys — the capital city, Thimphu, is the only one in the world without a traffic light — Bhutan remains relatively unexplored. And with a government committed to low-volume, high-value tourism, it wants to stay that way.

A trip to the Himalayan kingdom — one of Travel + Leisure's [best places to go in 2025](#) — may take more planning, but it's worth the added effort. You can explore stunning valleys and dramatic mountains, go on epic hikes and rafting adventures, and stay in luxurious hotels, all while interacting with the warm people of this country. As a top travel advisor, here's how I would plan a luxurious getaway to Bhutan.

Getting to Bhutan

Two airlines — Druk Air and Bhutan Airlines — serve Bhutan, and only a select few pilots are authorized to fly into Paro International Airport, because navigating the (breathtaking) mountain peaks and valleys is so challenging. Travel companies like [The Legacy Untold](#) help make the airport experience seamless; you'll be greeted upon arrival by your guide and driver.



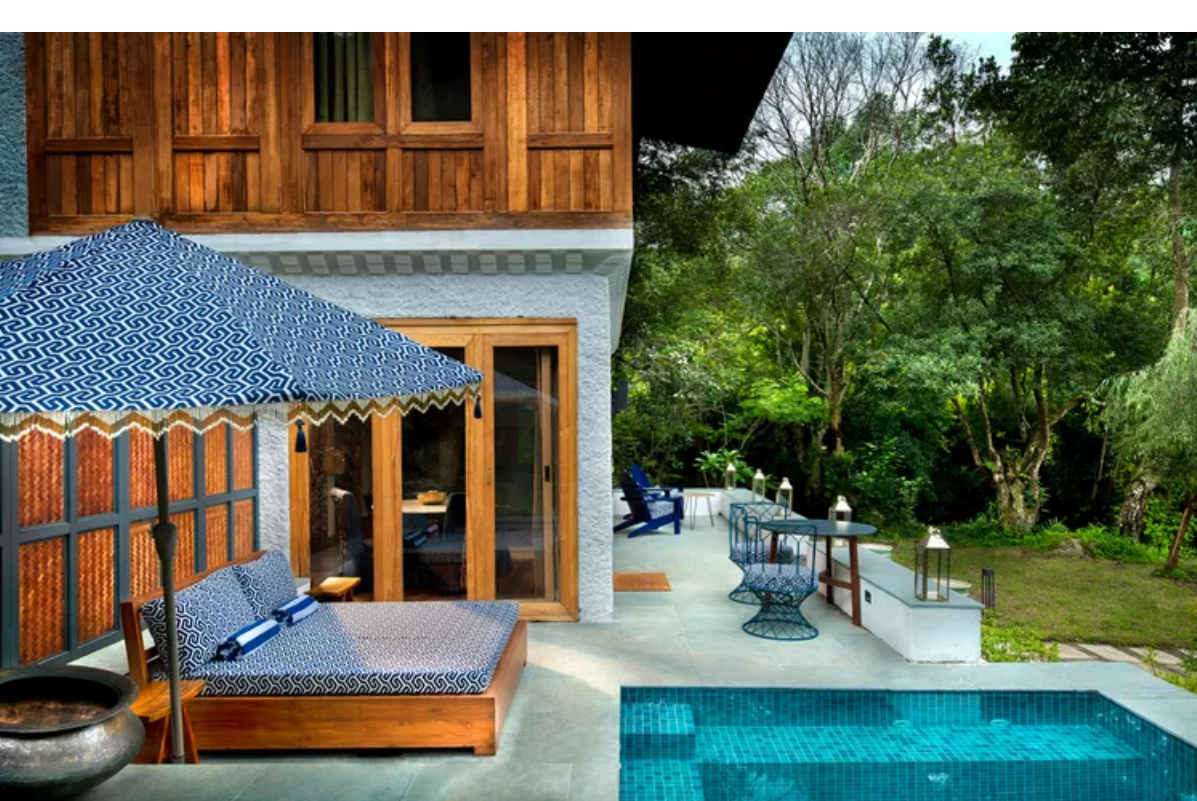
Dochula Pass, Bhutan, located near the capital, Thimphu. PHOTO: EDWIN TAN/GETTY IMAGES

Where to Go

Give yourself at least seven to 10 days to explore the country's wonders. First, you'll want to spend time in Thimphu, the capital city, which is about an hour from the airport. Here, you can visit local markets, try your hand at papermaking at the Jungshi Paper Factory, learn about the ancient art of weaving at the Royal Textile Academy, and shop for crafts at an array of boutiques. Don't miss the city's Buddha Dordenma (a giant statue of the Buddha); at 169-feet tall, it's one of the largest in the world. For more culturally immersive activities, try an [astrology](#) reading from the monks at Pangri Zampa, who blend ancient Buddhist wisdom with cosmic patterns to provide spiritual and practical guidance, or make local dishes during a hands-on private Bhutanese cooking lesson.

From Thimphu, head to Punakha by way of the Dochula Pass, a stunning mountain pass with 108 memorial stupas (Buddhist monuments). Stop at [Chimi Lhakhang Temple](#) and admire the structures believed by some to bestow blessings of fertility. You'll also want to visit the awe-inspiring Punakha Dzong, a fortress steeped in Bhutan's royal history and perhaps the most impressive structure I saw in the country. It's particularly stunning in springtime amidst lilac-hued blooms. For [thrill-seekers](#), navigate the rapids of the Pho Chhu River, an exhilarating way to take in the pristine surrounding landscape.

From Punakha, enjoy the scenic drive to the Phobjikha Valley (also known as the Gangtey Valley). Finish the trip in Paro with a four-hour trek to the famous Tiger's Nest, a stunning monastery hugging a dramatic cliffside at almost 10,000 feet above sea level. Here, breathtaking views and moments of quiet contemplation amid the pine forests and Spanish moss might bring about a spiritual awakening.



andBeyond Punakha River Lodge, in Punakha, Bhutan. PHOTO: COURTESY OF &BEYOND.COM

Where to Stay

Despite its limited number of tourists and lack of crowds, Bhutan has several spectacular boutique lodges with a strong sense of place, friendly service, great food, and fabulous design. Working with a travel advisor will help you mix and match luxury hotels that are seamlessly blending modern luxury with Bhutanese charm.



Spectacular views from Gangtey Lodge. PHOTO: COURTESY OF GANGTEY LODGE

I love the [Six Senses Bhutan](#) for its architectural brilliance, grand spaces, and focus on wellness and sustainability. [Amankora](#) was one of Bhutan's first luxury hotels and now has five lodges in wonderful locations, like Punakha and Paro, each offering exceptional food and service. [andBeyond Punakha](#) stands out for its experiential culinary offerings, like an amazing breakfast with views of dramatic vertical mountains, as well as sunset riverside bonfires with cocktails and luxe tented accommodations that connect guests to nature. Upon my visit, I fell hard for [Gangtey Lodge](#), which, at an elevation of 10,300 feet, feels off the grid in the best possible way. I love that when guests arrive at this intimate, family-owned hotel, the staff welcomes them with a song. Plus, the on-site offerings include in-room morning stretches, spectacular hikes, and some of the best hot-stone baths in the country.



Great Buddha Dordenma on the mountains of Bhutan, near the capital Thimphu. PHOTO: RUI T GUEDES/ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES/

Travel Deeper

Go off the beaten path and stay in a luxury mobile camp that moves away from the more typical five-valley travel circuit to villages and wild landscapes rarely visited by tourists. In Punakha, hike to a surprise breakfast overlooking the Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten Temple, the perfect spot for early-morning contemplation and croissants. In Paro, hang mountaintop prayer flags and offer a prayer for loved ones. For the [really adventurous](#), visit the remote and roadless Laya village in the greater Himalayan range in the north of the country, one of the world's highest human settlements and a distinct subculture of Bhutan. The Legacy Untold may even be able to arrange an overnight stay at one of the royal palaces.

[Mark Lakin](#) is a member of Travel + Leisure's A-List and Travel Advisory Board. He specializes in trips to far-flung locations. You can create a tailor-made itinerary with Lakin — starting at \$900 per person, per day to Bhutan — by contacting him at ml@thelegacyuntold.com.