

## BHUTAN THROUGH A LENS Capture the Kingdom with your Camera



SMALL GROUP PHOTOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE  
7 NIGHT FULLBOARD PACKAGE  
(5 nights Uma Paro, 2 nights Comfortable Rafting Camp, Punakha)

**November 21<sup>st</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2009**

From bustling markets to prayer flag strewn mountain passes and from happy monks in maroon robes to massive ancient fortresses, Bhutan is certainly a Shangri La for image-makers. In the month of November the monsoon clouds are a distant memory and the landscape snaps into sharp focus with crystal light, inky blue skies and fabulous mountain views. Uma Paro has developed this unique adventure for photographers of all levels and interests in association with Philip Bowen, a 16 year Bhutan veteran, accomplished photographer and COMO Activity Director who will accompany the group on their adventures in the Kingdom. Our time is divided between two properties in the distinctly different Paro and Punakha Valleys and is a combination of location shoots and serendipitous meetings or "happy accidents" with friendly locals along the way. Offering authentic insights into the magical Land of the Thunder Dragon and the chance to benefit from Philip's deep knowledge of the Kingdom, this is a dream trip for image-makers offering a once in a lifetime opportunity to document a unique way of life beyond the sky and the clouds.

Returning to our comfortable homes in the Himalaya (Uma Paro and Rafting Camp, Punakha) after each day's adventures - accommodation is included on a full-board basis, excluding beverages.

### **Day 1 Saturday November 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Arrival, check-in, show round and first photo opp** Uma Paro staff will welcome you at the airport for the 10 minute transfer to the property. After lunch, in order to aid acclimatisation and to get your bearings, we invite you for an introductory photo opp with a short, guided local walk. Stroll through bustling Paro Town and out to the massive Rinpung Dzong - 'Fortress on a Heap of Jewels'. The trail then leads across Paro Chhu (river) via a traditional covered bridge (Nyamai Zam) - this bridge provided the backdrop for scenes in the feature films, Little Buddha and Travellers and Magicians. This evening please join us for a welcome dinner and photographic adventure briefing with slide show.

**Duration of walk:** 2-3 hour photo opp

**Difficulty:** EASY

Guided with support vehicle

**Overnight : Uma Paro**

**Day 2 Sunday November 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Thimpu, Punakha Valley via Dochu La, Chimmi Lhakhang** An early morning start for the 45 minute drive means that on arrival, the capital's weekend market is in full swing. After lunch the drive is truly awe inspiring as it zigzags up to the 3,140m-high mountain pass of Dochu La with its forests of fluttering prayer flags, maze of memorial chortens and sweeping views of the main Himalayan range. A short walk across rice paddies to Chimmi Lhakhang, a fertility temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint known popularly as "Divine Madman." infamous for his colourful and sometimes outrageous adherence to the Buddhist faith. The temple sits atop a picturesque hill surrounded by rice fields and by late afternoon the light is perfect.

**Duration of drive:** 3 - 4 hours (76km)

**Overnight :** Comfortable Rafting Camp, Punakha

**Day 3 Monday November 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Punakha Dzong, Khamsan Yuley Namgay Chorten Walk, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong and Bazaar** A full day for further exploration of this scenic valley, low enough (1200m) to allow bananas and oranges to grow. The destination for this morning's optional walk up through whitewashed homesteads and farmland is Khamsan Yuley Namgay Chorten, a shrine recently built by the royal family a startlingly ornate and elaborate structure with a rainbow of Guru Rinpoche images and superb views of the Punakha Valley. Heading down along the riverside the massive architectural edifice of the 17th century Punakha Dzong (fortress/monastery) soon looms into view. Built in 1637 by Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal in a commanding position at the confluence of the Po Chhu and Mo Chhu (Father and Mother rivers). Bhutan's second oldest dzong goes by the full name of Druk Pungthang Decchen Phodrang (the Palace of Great Happiness) and is arguably the country's most attractive. It served as the seat of the Kingdom's government until the time of the second King and today serves as the winter home of Je Khempo, the head abbot of Bhutan, along with a retinue of 1,000 monks. An afternoon stroll through the quaint bazaar at Wangdue Phodrang to visit its dzong rounds off the day. Founded in 1638 by the Shabdrung, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong is located on a high promontory overlooking the Punak Chhu river.

**Duration:** 6 - 8 hours

**Difficulty:** EASY

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

**Overnight :** Comfortable Rafting Camp, Punakha

**Day 4 Tuesday November 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Punakha Valley to Paro, Chuzom, Tamchog Lhakhang, Traditional Farmhouse Dinner and location shoot** Time to retrace our steps back over the Dochu La for a second chance of that wonderful view of the Himalayan range. Returning to the Chuzom or confluence we catch a glimpse of the three shrines in Nepali, Tibetan and Bhutanese style which were built to ward off evil spirits near the checkpoint. The journey will be broken with a visit to Tamchog Lhakhang built by Thangtong Gyalpo or the Iron Bridge Builder as he is known. This former saint from the 14th century introduced the art of building suspension bridges with iron chains and the only way to reach his temple is by one of these photogenic bridges. On the final leg the road snakes alongside the Pa Chhu, through apple orchards and rice paddies, past quaint homesteads to our home in the Himalaya, Uma Paro. After check-in and a show round, we invite you to spend the rest of the day relaxing around the property, enjoying the facilities (Uma has two desktop computers in the library on which to view photos) or perhaps trying some other activity like the Bhutanese national sport of archery. In the early evening we pay our friendly Farmer Tshering a visit at his smallholding for a slap up Bhutanese dinner and the chance to shoot the farm at rice harvest time.

**Duration of drive:** 4 - 5 hours

**Distance:** 120km

**Difficulty:** EASY

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

**Overnight :** Uma Paro

**Day 5 Wednesday November 25<sup>th</sup>**

**Chele La, Kila Goemba and Dzongdrakha, Archery photoshoot**

Start early for the drive to Chele La (pass) which at 3810m is the highest road pass in Bhutan, snaking upwards through blue pine and rhododendron (Etho Metho) forests for 35km. On a clear day the view sweeps away to snow-dome of Bhutan's second highest peak Mt Jhomolhari (7314m). This sacred prayer flag bedecked pass has appeared in several Bhutanese films plus many fashion shoots in the past. Once we have captured our images, we walk down through the forest to Kila Goemba, an ancient nunnery and then further down the mountain we walk out to the Dzongdrakha Goemba complex, both locations are rarely visited by foreigners and once we have paid our respects and made some offerings the photography can begin in earnest. Back at Uma Paro our guides await in their finest traditional costumes (gho for men and kira for women) to put on an archery demonstration for our cameras.

**Duration of walks:** 3 - 4 hours

**Trail Conditions:** a well-trodden but narrow mountain path

**Difficulty:** MODERATE

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

**Overnight :** Uma Paro

**Day 6 Thursday November 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Kyichu Lhakhang, School Visit, Weavers location shoot, Free** A few kilometers north of Paro, we pay our respects at Kyichu Lhakhang one of the oldest temples in Bhutan with its magic orange tree which bears fruit all year round. This

ancient temple is connected to the famous Jokhang in Lhasa, Tibet and the comings and goings of the worshippers make for unforgettable images. Nearby, we have arranged a visit to a local school to meet the kids and handout some disposable cameras for a school project. Afterwards there is the opportunity to shoot at the weavers centre in Paro. The rest of the day is free for more photography or to begin the big job of editing all your unique images or perhaps just to relax around Uma Paro, enjoying the peace and quiet.

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

**Overnight : Uma Paro**

#### **Day 7 Friday November 27<sup>th</sup>**

**Taktsang Walk & Drukgyel Dzong location shoot** One of the most amazing and important pieces of architecture in Bhutan, Taktsang Goemba defies logic, gravity, and reason. Legend has it that this cliffside was where Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) landed on the back of a flying tigress, bringing Buddhism to Bhutan from Tibet. To avoid the hot sun an early start is advisable for the two-hour climb, via the cafeteria, to the Tiger's Nest viewpoint. Descend steeply, then climb up to the monastery, passing the waterfall (make monastery visit, if open – Uma Paro can arrange necessary permit). Retrace our steps or alternatively (if time and energy levels allow) head further up to several remote temples and monasteries. Drive further up the valley to Drukgyel Dzong, built in 1644 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to control northern route to Tibet. The route is picturesque, and the site of dzong magnificent (from here, only two-day hike to the border with Tibet, dominated by Mt Jhomalhari). We have arranged a special photo



shoot for the group at this fortress with the local traditional dance group performing masked dances and songs for us in several different colourful costumes. In the evening your group is invited for drinks and a slide show of everyone's favourite images before a fire lit farewell dinner either in the courtyard at Uma Paro or at our Bukhari restaurant.

**Trail Conditions:** Winding rough path which is steep at times

**Duration:** Taktsang Walk 4 - 6 hours

**Difficulty:** MODERATE TO HARD

Guided with support vehicle and picnic

**Overnight : Uma Paro**

#### **Day 8 Saturday November 28<sup>th</sup>**

**Depart Fly Paro to Bangkok** Druk Air departs in the early morning to avoid adverse weather conditions so after breakfast, it is time for your transfer to the airport for the group flight back to Bangkok.

#### **Package Inclusions**

All Bhutanese Government Visa Fees, Taxes and Royalties

Accommodation on a full board basis throughout (excluding beverages)

The services of an experienced European Guide and an English-speaking Bhutanese Uma Paro Guide

Transport including airport transfers

Mineral water on all days out

All entry permits and fees

All arrangements for listed special location shoots and models

Fire lit courtyard Welcome and Farewell Dinners

Complimentary scheduled 1 hour daily yoga class whilst at Uma Paro (except Sundays)

Complimentary use of the swimming pool, library and gym at Uma Paro

In order to take advantage of the FIT surcharge waiver guests must arrive and depart on the scheduled Druk Air flights to and from Bangkok on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of November. (any other flights will attract the FIT surcharge (\$30 pppd for two people and \$40 pppd for single travelers)

#### **Maximum Group Size 12 people** (minimum 3 people)

The group will be led by one of Uma Paro's highly trained and knowledgeable Bhutanese guide and Philip Bowen throughout. All main luggage is transferred, leaving you with just a daypack with whatever you require for that day's activities. All single travelers benefit from their own room throughout.

Uma Paro provides complimentary drinking water for all guided itineraries. If you have any special dietary requests, please let us know in advance. Where stated, trips include lunchtime picnics prepared by Uma Paro's chefs.

Please read this document in conjunction with your confirmation letter and pre-departure information.

Please Note: This itinerary is intended as a guide only. Local conditions and weather may necessitate variations to the program and can affect the availability of views and panoramas described. Be aware that all times stated are approximate, and may vary with individual and group fitness or interests.



**Visiting Sacred Sites** Although we have agreements and permits for the sacred sites we visit, at certain times we may be unable to enter owing to specific ceremonies or rituals underway. When visiting sacred sites like goemba (monasteries) or lhakhang (temples), when passing chortens (Buddhist stone monuments) or mani stone walls (stoned carved with the Buddhist mantra, 'om maani padme hum' which means 'hail to the jewel in the lotus'), always circle clockwise or pass to the left. The same applies when spinning a prayer wheel: rotate the wheel clockwise. The Department of Cultural Affairs advises that men should wear trousers and a shirt with a collar; women should wear a dress or long trousers. Shorts, hats, T-shirts, umbrellas, smoking and alcohol are not allowed. On entering a monastery, do not speak loudly. Remove your shoes. It is also customary to leave a small offering of money on the altar. Having done so, a monk may pour holy water from a sacred vessel (bumpa) into your hand. Make the gesture of sipping this water and then spread the rest on your head.

While there are no restrictions on photography outside monasteries, taking photos inside is strictly forbidden. If you wish to take a photograph of a Bhutanese person, please ask first and respect their reply – for the most part the Bhutanese love to meet foreigners and are only too happy to have their picture taken.

**Electricity** 220 volts AC. A limited supply of transformers is available at Uma Paro for appliances of different voltages, Uma's power points are fitted with multi plugs.

#### **Druk Air Tips for Passengers**

Hand Baggage Allowance - Druk Air requests that passengers limit their hand baggage to one piece, the size not exceeding 45+35+20 cm (17 ½ +13 ½ +8 inches) and the weight not exceeding 5 kg (11lbs).

Checked Baggage Allowance - Economy Class: 20 kg (44 lbs) Business Class: 30 kg (66 lbs)

Due to the limited hold space baggage is often left behind, most often from Bangkok. Bulky items should be booked ahead as unaccompanied baggage/cargo.

#### **Customs**

Photographers are advised that while stills cameras attract no customs duty, there is a very high levy imposed on video cameras.

For more information about this photographic adventure please email [philip.bowen@uma.como.bz](mailto:philip.bowen@uma.como.bz)

For more information on Uma Paro, including the full range of itineraries and services we offer (including individually guided trips, tailor-made itineraries, groups and the hosting of special events), please refer to the website [www.uma.como.bz](http://www.uma.como.bz) or email [info.paro@uma.como.bz](mailto:info.paro@uma.como.bz).