

# Seeking Happiness: The Kingdom of Bhutan

## November 2 – 13, 2026



Featuring: *Thomas Conlan, Professor of East Asian Studies and History,*  
*Princeton University*

PRINCETON  
JOURNEYS

Dear Princetonian,

Nestled high in the Himalayas, between India and China, lies Bhutan—a hidden kingdom of remarkable beauty, spiritual depth, and quiet seclusion. We invite you to join a small-group, Princeton-exclusive journey through both Eastern Bhutan, the country's spiritual heartland, and Western Bhutan, home to the capital city and the iconic Tiger's Nest monastery, dramatically perched on the edge of a sheer cliff.

Along the way you will explore off-the-beaten-path sites, spend time at a local school, receive a blessing from a nunnery, and enjoy a series of hikes to sacred temples. These experiences offer a rare window into the vitality of Bhutan's traditional culture and the extraordinary purity and beauty of its natural environment—qualities that make Bhutan one of the world's most distinctive destinations.

Traveling with you will be Princeton Professor of East Asian Studies and History Thomas Conlan, who will enrich the journey through a series of engaging lectures and conversations.

I hope you will consider joining us for this truly special Princeton Journey.

With warm regards,

*Bridget*

Bridget St. Clair  
Director  
Alumni Education and Travel  
Princeton University





## Itinerary

### November 2.\*\* Depart the U.S. for Bangkok, Thailand

Fly from the U.S. to Bangkok and cross the International Date Line.

November 3.\*\* Arrive Bangkok.

*Hyatt Regency Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (Meals aloft)*

*\*\*Departure dates will vary depending on your gateway airport and flight schedule. All guests must arrive no later than November 3<sup>rd</sup> in order to depart as a group for Bhutan on November 4<sup>th</sup>.*

### November 4. Bangkok → Thimphu, Bhutan

Meet your fellow Princeton Journeys travel companions at the Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport this morning and fly from Bangkok to Paro. En route to the capital city of Thimphu, walk across a 15<sup>th</sup> century iron bridge to *Tachogang Lhakhang*, 'Temple of the Excellent Horse.' Gather this evening for a welcome dinner at the Pemako Thimphu Hotel.

*Pemako Thimphu Hotel (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

### November 5. Thimphu

Visit the Great Buddha Dordenma, a gigantic bronze-and-gold-gilded Buddha statue that overlooks the entire Thimphu valley. At 52 meters high, it is one of the largest Buddha statues in the world. Next, visit the Memorial Chorten, built in memory of the third king of Bhutan and the focus of daily worship for many local Bhutanese. After lunch, interact

with students at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, a vocational school that teaches the 13 traditional Bhutanese arts, including woodcarving, embroidery, painting and statue-making.

*Pemako Thimphu Hotel (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

#### **November 6. Thimphu → Punakha**

Depart Thimphu this morning on a scenic overland journey to the eastern town of Punakha. En route, cross the dramatic Dochula Pass (10,130 feet), which on a clear day offers sweeping views of the Himalayan range.

On arrival, visit the Punakha Dzong, the winter residence of the *dratshang* (Central Monk Body) and widely regarded as the most beautiful monastery in Bhutan. Construction of the present dzong began in 1637 and was completed the following year, when it was consecrated as *Pungthang Dechen Phodrang*—the ‘Palace of Great Happiness.’

The day concludes with a gentle walk through villages and rice paddies to *Chimi Lhakhang*, the ‘Temple of the Divine Madman.’

*Dhensa Resort (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

**Chimi Lhakhang Hike** Distance: ~1.5 miles; Elevation gain: ~200–300 feet

#### **November 7. Punakha**

This morning, drive to Talo, hometown of Bhutan’s queen mothers, and embark on a beautiful three-mile village-to-village walk from Talo to the village of Nobgang for a chance to experience rural life in Bhutan. After lunch, continue on an optional hike along the banks of the Punakha River to *Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten*. This Chorten was built by the mother of Bhutan’s fifth king to promote peace, harmony, and stability in a changing world. The chorten offers commanding views of the upper Punakha valley.

*Dhensa Resort (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

**Talo to Nobang Walk** Distance: 3 miles; Elevation decrease: ~600–900 feet

**Optional Khamsum Yulley Hike** Distance: 5 miles; Elevation gain: ~450–600 feet

#### **November 8. Punakha → Bumthang Valley**

Continue the overland journey to the Bumthang Valley, the cultural and historic heart of the kingdom. Here the valleys are wide and the mountains have relatively gentle slopes, which give the surroundings a feeling of spaciousness that is unequalled in any other part of Bhutan. The scenic mountain drive will take most of the day with multiple picnic and photo stops. Check in to the Bhutan Mountain Resort, a small family-run lodge with clean rooms and warm hospitality. To celebrate your arrival in Bumthang, enjoy an evening bonfire and traditional music after dinner.

*Bhutan Mountain Resort (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

### **November 9-10. Bumthang Valley**

Spend the next two days exploring the Bumthang Valley, with ample opportunities for connection within the local community. Visit Pema Chöling Nunnery, set on a windswept plateau at the entrance to the Tang Valley, where the resident nuns will offer a private prayer ritual to bestow blessings for a safe journey. You will also spend time with students and teachers at a local elementary school, learning about Bhutan's uniquely Buddhist curriculum.

Walk through the countryside to *Kurjey Lhakhang*, a sacred temple associated with the Bhutanese saint Guru Rinpoche. Continue on foot to *Tamshing Goemba*, founded by the great revealer of treasures Pema Lingpa. In Bhutanese tradition, *terma*—treasures of spiritual or social significance—are believed to be hidden and later revealed to bring blessings to the land. The walk continues to the seventh-century Jambay Temple complex, among the most important monasteries in the valley, and to the holy site of *Membartsho*, or *Burning Lake*, where Pema Lingpa is said to have discovered relics of Guru Rinpoche. The sanctity of the lake is evident in the many small clay offerings left along its banks by local pilgrims.

You will also have the opportunity to visit the Ogyen Choling Museum, housed within a beautifully preserved heritage residence in the Tang Valley. The museum offers insight into Bhutan's history, culture, and traditional way of life.

Those who wish may join an optional moderately strenuous hike through villages and farmland to the rarely visited Kunzangdrak Monastery. Home to approximately 100 monks, the monastery offers a powerful spiritual atmosphere; if timing allows, you may hear the monks' chants accompanied by the resonant sound of Tibetan horns.

*Bhutan Mountain Resort (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

**Kunzangdrak Hike** Distance: 5 miles; Elevation gain: ~1,600–2,000 feet

### **November 11. Bumthang → Paro**

After breakfast, depart on a short flight back to Paro. Spend part of the afternoon exploring Paro's surroundings with a stop at the ancient temple of Kyichu Lhakhang, built by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo in 659 A.D. Check into your hotel and enjoy some time at leisure before meeting for dinner.

*Le Méridien Paro, Riverfront (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

### **November 12. Paro**

Today marks the highlight of any trip to Bhutan, a hike to the spectacularly located Tiger's Nest, or Taktsang Monastery, one of the most venerated pilgrimage sites of the Himalayan world. Clinging to a vertical granite cliff 3,000 feet above the valley floor, Taktsang gets its name from the legend that Guru Rinpoche, who first brought Buddhism to Bhutan in the eighth century, flew to this spot on the back of a flying

tigress. Enjoy a simple teahouse lunch before returning to Paro for time at leisure.

Tonight, celebrate with a wonderful Bhutanese farewell dinner.

*Le Méridien Paro, Riverfront (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

**Tiger's Nest Hike (no extension)** Distance: 6 miles round trip; Elevation gain: ~1,600–1,850 feet

*An optional two-mile uphill hiking extension is available today for more adventurous hikers. On the way, pass hermitages where monks reside in solitude for three years of mediation and self-exploration.*

**November 13. Paro → Bangkok, Thailand**

Fly from Paro to Bangkok for flights home.

*(Breakfast)*



**Tour Cost:** \$10,980

**Single Supplement:** \$2,150 (subject to availability)

## Accommodation

The accommodation for this tour has been carefully selected by Princeton Journeys and Authentic Asia. While the Pemako Thimphu Hotel and Le Meridien Paro, Riverfront are luxurious properties with western amenities, the more remote Dhensa Resort in Punakha and Bhutan Mountain Resort in Bumthang are simple family-owned lodges where travelers can expect clean but modest rooms.



### [Hyatt Regency Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport](#)

#### **Bangkok, Thailand**

The Hyatt Regency offers convenience and comfort, with easy access to the airport and to central Bangkok via Airport Rail Link. Enjoy a flexible check-in time that allows you to stay for 24 hours from your arrival, plus complimentary airport

transfers. Hotel amenities include a 24-hour café, a variety of restaurants and bars, 24-hour room service, fitness center, laundry service, free internet access, and an outdoor pool.

### [Pemako Thimphu Hotel](#)

#### **Timphu, Bhutan**

Situated in the vibrant heart of Bhutan's capital, Pemako Thimphu offers easy access to the city's top sights. An urban sanctuary, the Pemako Thimphu evokes the feel of a medieval fortress, where age-old traditions seamlessly intertwine with contemporary comforts. Its 66 meticulously crafted rooms and suites are complemented by fine dining and diverse amenities.





### Dhensa Resort

#### **Punakha, Bhutan**

Dhensa sits in the midst of the tranquil and lush Punakha Valley. Flanked by thick pine forests, it overlooks the Punakha River and hundreds of paddy fields that stair-step down to the valley floor. 24 rooms are set in six cottages, all with private balconies and

spacious interiors that are deliberately understated and designed for the modern traveler.

### Bhutan Mountain Resort

#### **Bumthang Valley**

Formerly known as the Bumthang Mountain Lodge—was among the first properties in Central Bhutan to welcome international travelers with warm, relaxed, and homelike hospitality. The lodge is run by a multi-generational family and offers a clean, comfortable, and inviting atmosphere.

Set on a spur just below Jakar Dzong and overlooking the Chokor Valley, the resort features a restaurant serving home-style Bhutanese cuisine as well as Wi-Fi and laundry service for guests' convenience.



### Le Méridien Paro, Riverfront

#### **Paro, Bhutan**

Le Meridien Paro, Riverfront, is situated on the edge of the Paro River, offering panoramic views of the Eastern Himalayas. 59 guest rooms are chic retreats offering striking Himalayan Valley and Paro River views. Amenities include the Explore Spa, indoor heated pool, fitness center, and two restaurants

### **A note about flights in and out of Bhutan**

*Economy flights on Druk Airlines or Bhutan Airlines to and from Bhutan, via Bangkok, are included in the price of your tour. The 2026 flight schedule will be finalized by the end of June 2026. **This could affect the current trip dates, which may need to be moved by one or two days.** Authentic Asia will confirm the final trip dates by July 1, 2026. **Participants should not book any international flights until this schedule is finalized.***

*All Druk Air and Bhutan Airlines flights depart Bangkok in the very early morning hours. The exact departure time will be made available by the end of June. Therefore, we recommend that when booking your international flights, you allow for an extra night or two in Bangkok prior to November 4, 2026. Accommodations at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport on November 3, 2026 are included in the trip price. Should you wish to book additional services in Bangkok or Thailand prior to or after the main tour, please contact our tour operator, Authentic Asia, for assistance.*

*At the end of our tour, the Druk Air/Bhutan Airlines flights to Bangkok will arrive in the late afternoon. Please keep in mind that these flights are always subject to weather conditions. **We therefore do NOT recommend booking a tight connection flight back to the U.S., but rather a late evening or next day flight.** Additional details about flights will be distributed to all participants in July 2026.*

### **A note about the tour activity level**

*This journey involves a significant level of physical activity, including extended uphill hiking, **frequent stair climbing**, and walking on uneven terrain. Participants must be in good physical health and **capable of walking four miles per day on uneven surfaces**. This level of mobility and endurance is essential in order to participate fully and safely in the tour.*

### **Terms and Conditions**

**Tour Cost:** \$10,980

**Single Supplement:** \$2,150 (subject to availability)

**Reservations and Payments:** To reserve a space, please register online or contact the Princeton Journeys team at 609.258.8686/journeys@princeton.edu. Balance of payment is due four months prior to departure. Personal checks should be made payable to our tour operator, Authentic Asia Tours and Travel.

**Included are:** All accommodations as listed; international flight between Bangkok and Paro in economy class; internal flights within Bhutan in economy class; all meals as listed in the itinerary; tea and coffee with all meals; bottled water with all meals and during all sightseeing; soda and juice drinks with all meals; beer and wine with the welcome and farewell dinners; all sightseeing and entrance fees; gratuities to guides, drivers, porters and wait staff; Bhutan visa fee; services of a professional tour manager and

national guide; lectures by a Princeton study leader.

**Not included are:** U.S. domestic and international airfare in and out of Bangkok; trip cancellation/baggage insurance; excess baggage fees; items of purely personal nature and those not expressly mentioned as included.

**Insurance:** As a service to its travelers, Princeton University automatically provides Princeton Journeys participants traveling internationally\* with basic medical, accident, and evacuation coverage under a group emergency travel protection plan. It is highly recommended that you supplement this basic protection with your own additional coverage, as well as trip cancellation/interruption or baggage coverage. Information on additional insurance will be emailed to you upon receipt of your reservation.

\*Please note, only U.S. residents are covered under the group emergency travel plan. Foreign national travelers should purchase insurance separately.

**Size:** This departure is limited to a maximum of 20 paying participants.

**What to expect:** This trip involves a certain amount of physical activity such as longer and more strenuous uphill hiking at altitude, stair climbing and walking on uneven surfaces. **Travelers must be in good physical health and able to walk up to four miles a day on uneven surfaces to participate in the tour.**

**Disclaimer:** Princeton University is pleased to facilitate travel opportunities for its alumni and friends through Princeton Journeys. Princeton Journeys works with tour operators to make available interesting and enriching travel opportunities for the Princeton family. Please note that neither the University nor Princeton Journeys conducts tours, nor does either act as an agent for guests interested in tours. Princeton Journeys acts as a facilitator with tour operators, and tour participants contract directly with tour operators to make arrangements for completing travel. Princeton Journeys encourages you to familiarize yourself thoroughly with the tour operator's cancellation and refund policies, and also to investigate available services such as trip cancellation insurance. Neither the University nor Princeton Journeys is responsible for changes to trips or travel arrangements or for losses or additional expenses resulting from or relating to travel. **Princeton Journeys' complete terms, which you are required to agree to before enrolling in a tour, can be found at: [alumni.princeton.edu/connect/princeton-journeys/terms-and-conditions](http://alumni.princeton.edu/connect/princeton-journeys/terms-and-conditions).**

**Cancellation Policy and Refund:** The tour deposit of \$2,000 is non-refundable. The final invoice will be sent 120 days prior to departure and is due upon receipt. Cancellations shall not be effective until they are received in writing and confirmed by Princeton Journeys.

**The following cancellation fees will apply:**

If a written request is received within 120-75 days prior to departure: 50% of the trip price will be refunded.

If a written request is received within 75-60 days prior to departure: 25% of the trip price will be refunded.

If a written request is received less than 60 days prior to departure no refund shall be issued.

No refund shall be issued after the tour has commenced, or for leaving the tour early. No refunds shall be issued for missed meals, sightseeing or any unused services.

**Responsibility:** Tour participants assume the responsibility to select a tour that is appropriate for his or her abilities and health. Authentic Asia acts only in the capacity of agents for the hotels, airlines, bus and

ship lines or owners of contractors providing accommodations, transportation or other services. As a result, all coupons, receipts or tickets are issued subject to the terms and conditions specified by the supplier. By acceptance of tour membership, the participant agrees that neither Authentic Asia nor any of its subsidiaries shall become liable or responsible for personal injury or illness, damage to person or property, loss, delay or irregularity caused by person not controlled by it, such as (without limitation) airlines, bus, and shipping companies, suppliers of accommodations or other services, or resulting from any acts of God, defects in vehicles, strikes, wars, whether declared or otherwise, civil disturbances, medical or customs regulations, acts of terrorism, epidemics, government restrictions, criminal or negligent acts or others, weather, or any other circumstances over which Authentic Asia has no control. Authentic Asia is not responsible for any additional expenses or liability sustained or incurred by the participants as a result of the abovementioned causes.

Tour participant acknowledges receipt of a copy of these Terms and Conditions and signifies acceptance of, and consents to all of the terms and conditions set forth herein, when registering for, or making payments on this tour.