

11-DAY ADVENTURE

THE CHOMOLHARI TREK

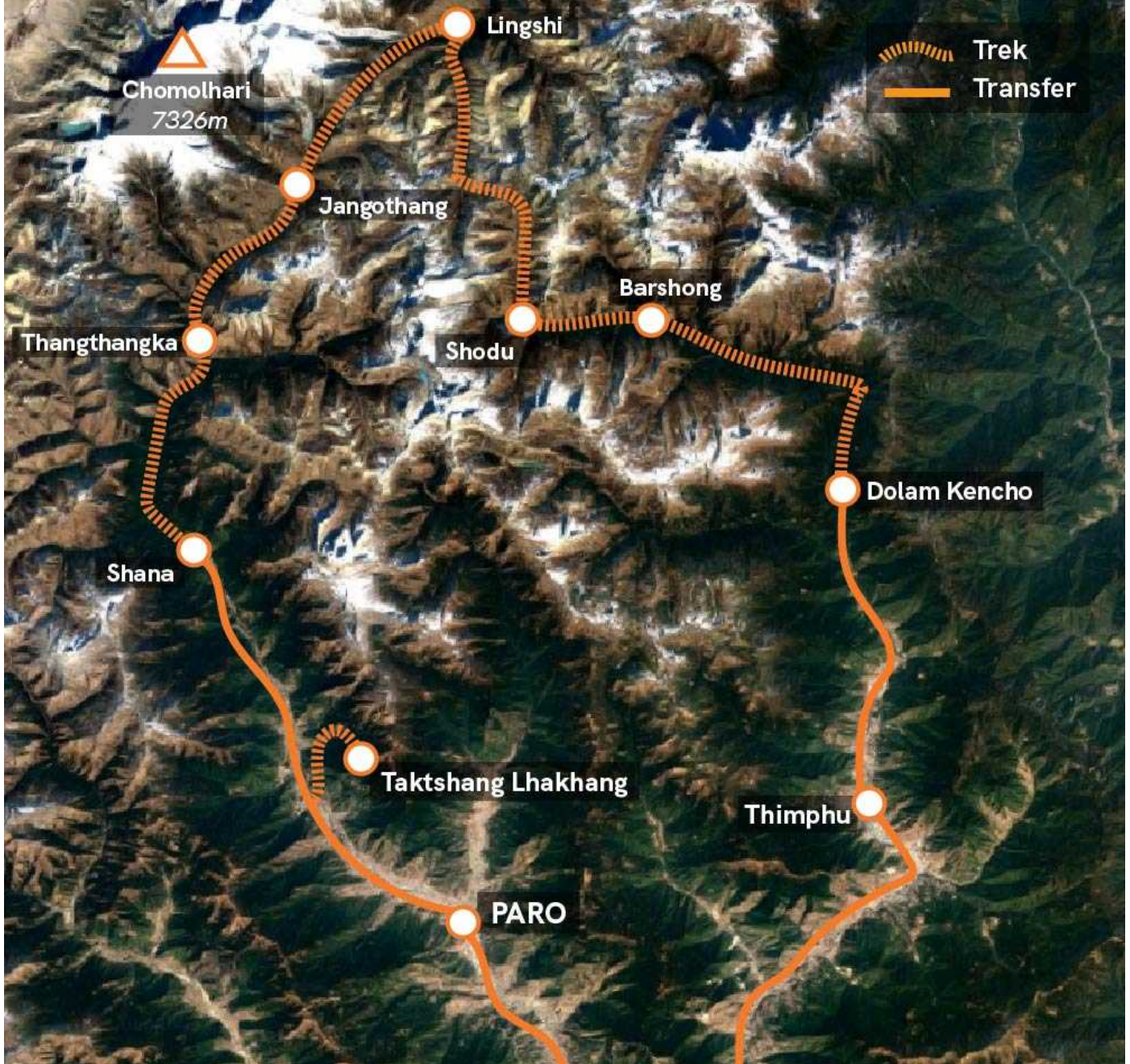
Bhutan

Often referred to as the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon', this tiny Himalayan Kingdom, nestled between India and the People's Republic of China in the Eastern Himalayas, is one of the most isolated nations on earth. Each part of Bhutan has its own historical, geographical, cultural and religious significance, and any visit to this beautiful and largely unspoiled setting will combine spectacular mountain terrain, ancient monasteries, rich flora and fauna, and a vibrant Buddhist culture.

The Chomolhari Base Camp trek is a seven day trek, which ranges from the picturesque valleys of Paro and Thimphu, to the incredible mountain vistas of Chomolhari (7326m), Jichu Drake (6794m) and Tshrim Khang. Our tour begins with a visit to the stunning Tiger's Nest Monastery, located high on the cliffside of the upper Paro valley.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit the breath-taking Tiger's Nest Monastery
- Trek through unspoilt wilderness
- Be immersed in the culture of this ancient Himalayan kingdom



ITINERARY

DAY 1

ARRIVAL

The Kandoo team will meet you at Paro airport and transfer you to your pre-trek hotel. Later in the afternoon there is the option to join a tour of the city. Once a watchtower, built to defend Rinpung Dzong during inter-valley wars of the 17th century, Ta Dzong was inaugurated as Bhutan's National Museum in 1968. It holds a fascinating collection of art, relics, religious thangka paintings and Bhutan's exquisite postage stamps. The museum's circular shape augments its varied collection which is displayed over several floors. Afterwards, we will take a walk down a hillside trail to visit Rinpung Dzong, which has a long and very interesting history. Built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the first spiritual and temporal ruler of Bhutan, the Dzong houses the monastic body of Paro, the office of the Dzongda (district administrative head) and Thrimpon (judge) of Paro district. The approach to the Dzong is through a traditional covered bridge called Nemi Zam, which offers a good view of the architectural wonder of the Dzong as well as life around it. Later you will attend a pre-trek briefing with your Lead Guide to prepare you for the journey ahead

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included: **Lunch / Dinner**

DAY 2

EXCURSION TO TAKTSHANG LHAKHANG

In the morning we will take an excursion to Taktshang Lhakhang, commonly known as 'The Tiger's Nest Monastery'. Undoubtedly one of the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, the Taktshang monastery is one of the most breath-taking temples in the world. This Buddhist place of worship is perched on a cliff-top at around 3,100m (10,000ft) above sea level. The main temple complex was built in 1692, and is considered to be one of the holiest for the Bhutanese people. Legend has it that Guru Rinpoche, an 8th-century Indian Buddhist master, arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery, thus the name 'Tiger's Nest'. The site has been recognized as a sacred place and is now visited by all Bhutanese at least once in their lifetime. On 19 April, 1998, a fire severely damaged the main structure of building but now this Bhutanese jewel has been restored to its original splendour.

After lunch we will visit the 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the 108 temples built in the Himalayas by Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. The building of this temple marks the introduction of Buddhism to Bhutan. We will then drive to Drukgyel Dzong, a ruined fortress where Bhutanese warriors fought Tibetan invaders centuries ago. In the early 1950s, Drukgyel Dzong was almost completely destroyed by fire. It is now listed in Bhutan's Tentative List for UNESCO inclusion. In 2016, the Prime Minister Lyonchen Tshering Tobgay, announced that the Dzong will be rebuilt and reinstated to its former glory. The snowy dome of sacred Chomolhari (7326m), 'the Bride of Kangchenjunga', can be seen in all her glory from the approach road to the Dzong. After our tours we will return to our hotel in Paro

Hiking time: **4 - 5 hours**

Ascent: **860 m**

Descent: **860 m**

Max. altitude: **3110 m**

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 3

TREK TO THANGTHANGKA

After a 2 hour drive through rice terraces, fields of millet and apple orchards, we reach Shana Zampa from where we will start our trek. If the day is clear, we will have our first views of the summit of Chomolhari at the head of the valley. Soon the valley widens and we reach the army post of Gunyitsawa. This is the last stop before Tibet, with a fork in the path leading across the Tremo La (Forbidden Pass) into Tibet. The trail follows the Pa Chhu river, ascending and descending through pine, oak and spruce forests. We enter the Jigme Dorje National Park, the largest protected area in Bhutan. After crossing a bridge to the left bank of the river, we stop for lunch. We then continue along the river, and as we climb higher, the forests are replaced with rhododendron, bamboo and ferns. We cross the river once more before reaching our campsite.

Hiking time: **7 - 8 hours**

Ascent: **1360 m**

Max. altitude: **3610 m**

Accommodation: **Camping**

Meals included:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 4

TREK TO JANGOTHANG

The path ascends, passing a small army camp and chorten. We leave the forest behind and can fully experience the huge mountain vistas. We then follow the river above the tree line, enjoying the stunning views of the surrounding peaks - from here, the views of Chomolhari (7326m) and Jichu Drake (6794m) are superb. Lunch is served at a yak herder's camp followed by a short walk into the valley which takes us to our campsite at Jangothang, situated below the ice-covered east face of Chomolhari at 4040m

Hiking time: **5 - 6 hours**
Ascent: **430 m**
Max. altitude: **4040 m**
Accommodation: **Camping**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 5

ACCLIMATISATION AT JANGOTHANG

The base camp at Jangothang sits by an old ruined fortress, beneath Mount Chomolhari and its neighbour Jichu Drake. Today we will take an acclimatisation hike to around 4500m for some great views of these two colossal mountains. Following the 'walk high, sleep low' principle, this hike will really help with your acclimatisation.

Hiking time: **3 - 4 hours**
Ascent: **460 m**
Descent: **460 m**
Max. altitude: **4500 m**
Accommodation: **Camping**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 6

TREK TO LINGSHI VIA NYELE LA

The trail follows the stream before we cross a bridge to the right bank. Now the climb starts up to the first ridge, where we can enjoy breath-taking views of Mt Chomolhari, Mt Jichu Drake and Tserim Khang. The trail then takes us across a fairly level valley floor until the climb to the Nyele La Pass (4,850m). From the pass we descend gradually through rhododendron forest to our campsite at Lingshi, enjoying the panoramic view of the mountain peaks and Lingshi Dzong as we walk. The Dzong was built in 1668 to protect villages in this region from Tibetan invasion, and continues to be used as an administrative centre.

Hiking time: **7 - 8 hours**
Ascent: **810 m**
Descent: **1050 m**
Max. altitude: **4850 m**
Accommodation: **Camping**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 7

TREK TO SHODU VIA YALE LA

Today is the toughest day of our trek, as we cross our highest pass. We begin the trek with a climb up towards a small white chorten on a ridge, then turn south into the deep Mo Chhu valley. The trail stays on the west side of this largely treeless valley, climbing steeply. It then crosses the river, and continues to climb steeply for two hours to Yale La pass (4,950m). On a clear day, you can see Chomolhari, Gangchhenta, Tserim Khang and Masang Gang. We then descend alongside a stream until we reach Shodu.

Hiking time: **8 - 9 hours**
Ascent: **1150 m**
Descent: **870 m**
Max. altitude: **4950 m**
Accommodation: **Camping**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 8

TREK TO BARSHONG

Back below the tree line, our path follows the course of the Thimphu Chhu river, descending through rhododendron, juniper and mixed alpine forests. There are stunning views of rocky cliff faces and waterfalls along the way before we descend a steep stone staircase to the river and stop at the riverside for lunch. Then the trail takes us gradually upwards to the ruins of Barshong Dzong (3,710m), where we camp for the night.

Hiking time: **6 - 7 hours**
Descent: **370 m**
Max. altitude: **4080 m**
Accommodation: **Camping**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 9

TREK TO DOLAMKENCHO AND DRIVE TO THIMPHU

The trail descends gently through a dense forest of rhododendron, birch and conifers, then drops steeply to meet the Thimphu Chhu river. The trail runs along the left bank of the river, climbing over ridges and descending into gullies where streams run down into the river. The final stage of the trail climbs around a cliff face high above the Thimphu Chhu river, coming out onto pastureland at Dolamkencho at 3,320m. Our transport will meet us here and we will drive to Thimphu, which takes about 1 hour. Your hotel will be a welcome sight!

Hiking time: **5 - 6 hours**
Descent: **1360 m**
Max. altitude: **3710 m**
Accommodation: **Hotel**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 10

DRIVE TO PARO

We start this morning in Bhutan's capital city with a visit to the National Library, which holds a vast collection of ancient Buddhist texts and manuscripts. We will also visit the nearby Institute for Zorig Chusum, the Textile Museum, and finally Simply Bhutan, a living Museum and Studio encapsulating the cultural heritage of the Bhutanese people. (Please note some sites will be closed on weekends and public holidays). After lunch we will leave Thimphu and drive up a series of zigzags to Dochu-La Pass (3,088m) stopping briefly here to take in the view and admire the chorten, mani wall, and prayer flags which decorate the highest point on the road. After crossing the pass, the road descends into the Paro Valley, where we will spend the night in a hotel.

Accommodation: **Hotel**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 11

DEPARTURE

We will collect you from your hotel and transfer you to Paro Airport for your flight

Meals included: **Breakfast**

TRIP INFORMATION

DIFFICULTY

The Chomolhari trek is tougher than the Druk Path trek as it takes you closer in to the high mountains, meaning you spend more time at a higher altitude. You will be trekking on good trails but will definitely feel the effects of altitude, as you quickly ascend above 3,500m on the first day of the trek. Saying that, you will have climbed up to the Tiger's Nest Monastery on the previous day, which will greatly help with acclimatisation. There are a couple of high passes to tackle that are just shy of 5,000 metres, the Nyele La Pass at 4,850m and the Yale Pass at 4,950m. In the middle of these two passes is Chomolhari Base Camp, where you will spend the night sleeping at just over 4,000 metres. Even though this is a short hike, a good level of fitness will help with the ascents at altitude.

FOOD & DRINK

On our Bhutan treks meals are provided during your stay at the pre and post trek hotels, and dishes will be prepared for you on your trek. All meals are provided on a fixed menu basis, with enough options for vegetarians. Bhutanese cuisine generally consists of steamed rice (red and white) with a varied choice of spicy curries, both vegetarian and non vegetarian. Most hotels provide meals buffet-style. There are usually continental, Indian, Chinese and Bhutanese dishes. The food in hotels is often the best in town, but restaurants in the main towns are increasingly becoming popular. All tourist hotels have a good selection of international and Bhutanese beverages. We provide healthy and nutritious cooked meals on your trek for every meal which always include fresh vegetables and meat. Everyday a lunch boy will catch you up on the trail in time to serve you a hot picnic lunch. We cater for a variety of special dietary requirements, whether you're vegetarian or gluten-free just let us know when you book.

In addition to the drinking water we provide on the trek, we will also provide drinking water during your cultural tours. To reduce the use of plastic bottles, we would ask that you bring a re-usable drinks bottle that we can fill for you. If you are planning on using a hydration bag for the trek, this may not be comfortable to use around town, so we recommend you bring a smaller drinks bottle as well.

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels in Bhutan are not categorized into stars as in most of the other countries, however, all hotels have to be approved by the Tourism Council of Bhutan. Our standard hotels are all clean and comfortable and are chosen because of their great locations, often in quieter parts of town, to help you get a good nights' sleep.

Kandoo use good quality, spacious tents to ensure you stay warm, dry and comfortable on your Bhutanese trek. They are designed to sleep three people, but we only ever sleep 2 to a tent, to ensure you have plenty of space for you and your gear. Keep in mind, these are proper mountain tents, designed to cope with extreme conditions so don't expect to be able to stand up and walk around inside! Your meals will be taken in a separate mess tent where you will be able to sit comfortably, while you relax and chat to your team mates and enjoy some of the delicious food that our cook has freshly prepared for you. Inside, you'll be pleased to find a table (of course) and a proper, comfortable chair with arms. With a full 2 metres of headroom, even the tallest climbers will be able to stretch a bit, and move about without hunching over.

In Bhutan, all the hotels will have western flushing toilets. On the trek, the remote nature of the trip means the toilets will be less luxurious, however we do everything we can to make them private and as comfortable as possible in such extreme conditions. At camp, you will have a toilet tent that provides a little privacy and will simply cover a hole in the ground upon which a portable seat has been set up. If you need to use the toilet whilst trekking then this will be a case of finding somewhere hidden, off the path and going wild. We can guarantee it will be the most scenic toilet break you've ever had!

TRANSPORT

We insist on using a high standard of vehicle and driver for all of our transfers. In Bhutan it is not a legal requirement to have seatbelts fitted in the back of vehicles, and while we try to use vehicles that do have rear seatbelts fitted, this cannot always be guaranteed. If you are unhappy about any aspect of the vehicle or the standard of driving, please speak to the driver or our local office immediately.

LUGGAGE

Bag weight: 15kg

We operate a strict limit of 15kg for your main equipment bag. This is more than sufficient for your needs on the trek. Your bag will be weighed before you leave the hotel to start the trek and if it is overweight you will have to take items out and leave them at the hotel.

Your main equipment bag will be carried by mules for the trek. You should also bring a small day pack to carry water, snacks and anything else you may need whilst trekking. This could be used as your hand luggage on your flight. On the trek all items must be packed in your main equipment bag or daypack. They should not be attached to the outside, as we are not responsible if items fall off when the bags are being carried by the mules.

HOW DO I GET THERE?

Currently there are only two airline operators that fly to Bhutan, Drukair and Bhutan Airlines. The main airport is in Paro (2,225m) and currently receives flights from Bangkok, Dhaka, Delhi, Kolkata, Kathmandu, Doha, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. This means that you need to get to one of these hubs to catch a connecting flight to Paro.

The flight into Paro is pretty exciting as the position of the airport requires the plane to get much closer to the mountain tops than most other flights in the world. If you are lucky enough to fly from Kathmandu to Paro and the weather is clear you will fly over 4 of the 5 highest mountains in the world - Mt. Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Kangchenjunga.

If you are changing airlines or re-checking your luggage at an airport on route to Paro, please ensure you leave a minimum of 3 hours between flights. This will account for any delays on arrival, travel time across airports (this can take longer than you think) and time taken to re-check baggage.

BUDGET & CHANGE

The Bhutanese Ngultrum (Nu) is the local currency of Bhutan and equal in value to the Indian Rupee. It is a closed currency so you will not be able to buy this before you arrive. All major currencies, such as US Dollars, Sterling Pounds and Euros, and traveller's cheques can be exchanged at Paro Airport, banks and hotels. Hotels in the towns will accept foreign currency but we recommend that you take local currency on the actual trek with you for incidentals and souvenirs. Top tip: \$50 bills/travellers' checks (and larger) get a better exchange rate than smaller bills.

Bhutan is a cash economy and credit cards are not commonly accepted. Mastercard may be accepted in larger shops and hotels, but Amex is rarely accepted. If you are relying on a credit or debit card for emergency funds while you travel, make sure you tell your card issuer that you will be using it abroad, or you may find that it won't work when you really need it.

A meal out for 2 people in Bhutan will cost ~\$18, however this is included in the cost of your trip so, unless you wish to eat at a different restaurant, the only money you need is for tips and souvenirs. The most common souvenir purchases are Bhutanese wall hangings. These can be expensive, ranging from \$20-\$1000. Prepare for this if you plan on bringing one home. There are, however, plenty of inexpensive souvenirs you can pick up as well. Our recommended guidance for spending budget in Bhutan would be between \$50-150 on top of your tips, give you ample souvenir spending money.

TIPS

Tipping is not approved by the Bhutanese tourist board. However, it has become **customary practice** to tip the guides, cooks and other members of the support team who have assisted you throughout your trek. The decision on how much to tip should be determined by how well the team served you while you were on the trek. Tips can be made in US dollars or Bhutanese Ngultrum. It is very important that US bills be new (less than 10 years old), crisp and unturned. See below our tip recommendations **per trekker** for this trip:

Lead guide: \$150

Assistant guide (groups of 5+ only): \$100

Cook: \$90

Assistant Cook: \$60

Lunch Boy/Staff: \$60

Horseman: \$60

Driver: \$40

Different crew members will be with you for different stages of your trip to Bhutan:

- Your guides will be with you every day that you are in Bhutan. An assistant guide will only be needed if your group exceeds 5 people (You will be provided with this information 3 weeks before departure)
- Your cook, lunch boy and horsemen will be with you while you are on the trek itself (you may have up to 5 staff and 3 horsemen on your trek, depending on the number of participants. You will be provided with this information 3 weeks before departure)
- Your driver will provide your airport transfers, drive you for your cultural tours and transfer you to and from the trek.

Once you have completed your hike to the Tigers Nest Monastery on the first day, our team will have a better idea of your fitness levels and may decide to include additional crew on the trek to ensure the success of everyone in the group.

FORMALITIES & HEALTH

PASSPORT

Please double check that your passport is valid for 6 months beyond the date of arrival in Bhutan. We recommend that you take a photocopy of your passport and keep it separate from the original, as this will be useful if the original is lost while you are traveling.

VISA

Visa requirements:

Visas can only be arranged by travel companies and are issued on arrival to those on a prepaid all-inclusive tour. In order to process your Bhutan visa we require a clear readable colour copy of your passport containing the passport number and photograph in JPEG or PDF format.

Transit visas:

Your domestic flight into Bhutan is likely to be on a separate ticket to your international flight. As a result, your luggage will not be checked right through to your final destination and you will need to clear immigration at your transit airport in order to collect your bag and check it back in for your international connection. Double check with your airline what the immigration and visa requirements are for the airport you are to transit through, and whether they are able to re-check your bags for you. Otherwise, you may need to arrange transit visas prior to travel. This is especially important if you are planning on travelling via India, as a transit visa is required and it must be arranged in advance.

VACCINATIONS

The following vaccination guide is an information resource only. You should not rely on it for diagnostic or prescriptive purposes. You should always speak with your GP or other health care professional about any vaccinations or other medicines you are considering taking. They will have more information about your specific health needs, and can make much more specific, reliable recommendations for you. In general, we recommend the following vaccinations

- Hepatitis A and B
- Everyone Typhoid
- Everyone Polio - We recommend a booster shot for adult travellers
- Yellow Fever - Necessary for all travellers who will arrive via areas prone to yellow fever
- Rabies - Not necessary unless visiting lowland areas
- Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) - We recommend a double dose for anyone born after 1956, unless they have already been given this vaccination
- Tetanus & Diphtheria - This vaccination should be renewed every 10 years

INSURANCE

Before you can join any Kandoo Adventures trek, you will need to insure yourself against accident, injury, and illness.

Your insurance must cover the cost of helicopter evacuation and repatriation if necessary. Make sure your insurer knows of your travel plans, and verify that your policy fully covers your trek, climb, and any other activities you will participate in. Specifically, treks to Chomolhari and the Druk Path require insurance coverage up to 5000m and the Snowman Trek up to 6000m.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are fully and adequately insured for the duration of your trip. Please ensure that all activities, excursions and destinations in your itinerary are included in your travel insurance policy, in addition to your regular cover for cancellation and medical expenses.

We ask that you keep a copy of your policy summary (containing policy number and the emergency contact number for your insurer) in your day sack at all times, so that we can access this information should we need to contact the insurer on your behalf.

We recommend the global supplier of travel insurance, World Nomads. Make sure to add 'hiking up to 6,000m' on check out and be sure to read the small print carefully for any policy you are considering. Different policies provide different levels of cover, so make sure you understand what is and isn't included in your policy.

HEALTH

Malaria

There is little risk of malaria on the majority of Bhutanese treks that we operate, due to the altitude, particularly in Bumthang, Gasa, Paro and Thimphu. However, there is a risk of malaria in areas below 1,500m so we recommend you take advice if traveling outside the areas in which we operate.

In addition to any medication, we would recommend you take every precaution to prevent mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeved trousers and shirts at dusk and dawn when the mosquitos are active, and by using a DEET based mosquito repellent.

OTHER INFORMATION

Animal welfare:

In the Bhutanese mountains the use of mules and muleteers is very common. The strong and sure footed mules have spent their lives up here in the mountains and they can transport your gear from A to B with ease. Mules are a big source of income for the local people, as a result they are generally treated with great respect and consideration for their well being. However there are always exceptions and in some cases mules have experienced terrible neglect and cruelty.

The main problems that cause suffering for mules are: traditional bits, overloading, inadequate feeding, wounds, poor footcare and working unfit mules (lame, sick or injured).

Kandoo Adventures are committed to ensuring that the mules we use on our treks receive only the very best treatment.

To ensure the animals are never overloaded we have placed restrictions on the weight of the luggage you can bring with you. Your main bag must always be flexible and not weigh more than 15kg. The maximum load a mule can carry is 80kg, this will ensure the health and comfort of the mule as well as a sustainable working life. We will not start trekking with mules who are obviously lame, sick or wounded. We will never condone the use of traditional bits which can cause terrible pain for the animals. We only work with a select number of horsemen who we know and trust to provide the very best level of care to their animals.

EQUIPMENT & CLOTHING

CLOTHING TO BRING

HEADGEAR

- Warm beanie style hat – knitted or fleece
- Neck gaiter or scarf. It can get dusty in Bhutan and the air very cold. A scarf or balaclava comes in useful for keeping dust out and can double as a warm layer for your neck / face!
- Sun hat – preferably wide-brimmed for protection
- Sunglasses – high UV protection
- Headlamp (plus extra batteries)

UPPER BODY

- Thermal or fleece base layer (x1)
- Long sleeve shirt/tshirt – light or medium weight, moisture wicking (x1)
- Short sleeved shirt/tshirt – lightweight, moisture wicking (x2)
- Fleece or soft shell jacket (x1)
- Insulated jacket – down or primaloft
- Lightweight water/windproof hard shell outer jacket
- Gloves – lightweight, fleece or quick drying fabric
- Gloves or mittens – heavyweight, insulated, preferably water resistant

LEGS

- Leggings – thermal or fleece base layer (x1)
- Trekking trousers – light or medium weight (x2) – convertible trousers work well
- Waterproof hard shell trousers – ski pants work fine (x1)

FEET

- Trekking boots – mid weight with good ankle support
- Training shoe or similar – to wear around camp
- Mid-weight trekking socks (x3 pairs)
- Breathable, high-wicking liner socks (x2 pairs)
- Thermal trekking socks for upper reaches of your trek (x1 pair)

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

- Small Rucksack or Daypack (30-40 litres) to carry water and personal items
- Waterproof duffle bag (approx 80-100 litres) – max weight when full should be 15kg. This weight restriction includes your sleeping bag. Your duffle will be carried by a porter
- Sleeping bag (4 season or -10 Deg C) and compression sack
- Insulated sleeping mat
- Trekking poles
- Water bottle or hydration bag – must be able to carry 1.5-2L of water

OTHER ACCESSORIES

- Sunscreen high SPF
- Toiletries, including wet wipes and hand sanitiser – please carry all rubbish back off the trail
- Camera and spare batteries
- Plug adapter, for charging devices in hotels
- Personal medication and first aid kit
- Personal snacks and energy bars – dried fruit and nuts are also a good source of energy
- Isotonic drink powder / energy drink powder to mix in with your water. This improves flavour and helps replace electrolytes
- Microfibre towel for wiping hands and face each day
- Ear plugs, if you are a light sleeper
- Pee bottle, useful for late night toilet needs
- Dry bag (only required if your main duffle bag is not waterproof)

HOW TO BOOK THIS TRIP

1 CHOOSE YOUR DATE AND CHECK AVAILABILITY

A full list of available dates can be found on our website.

2 CONTACT US

Contact us by phone, email or through our website. We will answer any questions you may have and send you a personalized itinerary and quote.

3 COMPLETE BOOKING AND PAYMENT

When you are ready to book, we will send you a link to our online booking forms and participation agreements. We accept all major credit and debit cards and require a low 20% deposit to secure your place.

