



# Mystical Bhutan Biking Adventure

*PARO TO GUWAHATI*

## OVERVIEW

Soaring mountains, endless forests, ancient monasteries, and a proud heritage – the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan beckons intrepid cyclists to traverse its breathtaking landscapes and explore its rich traditions. This epic 15-day journey is the final word in cycling tours through the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon' following the Lateral Road – Bhutan's primary east-west route – for 785 km, from the capital Thimphu at the foot of the Himalayas to the border outpost of Samdrup Jongkhar on the edge of the Assam Plain. But it's not just about the thrill of the ride – we also slow down to discover Bhutan's most iconic dzongs (fortified monasteries) and immerse ourselves in a highland world of untamed woodlands, grazing herds of yaks, and rural bliss.

We begin in Paro with a visit to Bhutan's iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery, an unforgettable hike that also serves as a warm-up for our lungs and legs! The next day, based in Thimphu, we tackle the formidable Dochula Pass, rewarded with a long, winding descent into Punakha Valley, where we explore the country's most photogenic dzong. From here we follow gushing rivers and rugged mountain passes to reach the Bumthang Valley, the spiritual heartland of Bhutan. A rest day allows us to discover the birthplace of Bhutanese Buddhism before we venture into the remote Tang and Ura valleys where glistening rice paddies blanket the rolling hills. The final stage of our adventure features simply stunning scenery as we rise and fall with the contours of the Himalayan foothills to reach Trashigang, the easternmost point on Bhutan's Lateral Road. And finally, after a last set of gradual climbs, we relish in the grand finale: a descent from over 2,000 metres to near sea level as we roll to the Bhutanese border with the Indian state of Assam. On the last day we cross into India and drop you off in the bustling city of Guwahati, where you can catch your onward flight.

We ride a total of 785 km over 11 cycling days. Bhutan is the most mountainous country in the world which means that cycling involves either going up or going down, with hardly any flat sections! The average daily elevation gain is nearly 2,000 metres, but the gradients are generally gentle, and a support vehicle is always on hand.

Our tour follows Bhutan's "Lateral Road," a winding east-west route connecting the Kingdom's remote regions. We begin in Paro, acclimating to the altitude and exploring key sites before hiking

to the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery on Day 2. From there, we transfer to Thimphu, where the cycling begins. Traversing valley after valley, we tackle mountain passes and sweeping descents, soaking in Bhutan's pristine air (one of the most forested countries in the world), stunning Himalayan views, agrarian traditions, and rich cultural heritage. The average daily distance is 70 km, with the longest ride being 111 km (Day 5) and the shortest rides at 30–35 km (Days 4 and 8). Between Days 11 and 14, distances increase to 80–90 km. On Day 7, we enjoy a full day off the bikes in the Punakha Valley, Bhutan's spiritual heartland. Along the way, we visit Bhutan's famed dzongs (fortified monasteries), Buddhist temples, and breathtaking Himalayan landscapes. For many, the highlight is the deep immersion into the lifeways of Bhutanese communities living in the remote highland valleys of the Himalayan foothills.

In areas with well-established tourism infrastructure, such as Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, and Bumthang, we stay in comfortable 3-star hotels known for their traditional charm and convenient locations. In more remote regions, accommodations are simpler and reflect either the best or the only options available. In places like the Tang Valley, Sengor, and Wamrong, camping may be necessary depending on group size and lodging availability. Throughout the journey, you'll savour delicious traditional Bhutanese meals, with occasional Western options. In remote areas where restaurants are unavailable, we provide packed lunches or dinners.

The trip is fully supported, and your guide's expert knowledge of the area and terrain means that you always know what is coming up in terms of distance and difficulty. This makes a tremendous difference, as does the constant supply of water and refreshments along the way.

Join us on this extraordinary journey and discover the mystical land of Bhutan by bike!

- DURATION - 15 DAYS
- AVERAGE DISTANCE PER DAY - 60 KM
- ARRIVAL DESTINATION - PARO
- DEPARTURE DESTINATION - GUWAHATI

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1 ARRIVAL IN PARO

Welcome to Bhutan! You'll be met at Paro airport and transferred to your hotel. After lunch, we'll begin our exploration of Paro's must-see sites and start acquainting ourselves with Bhutan's rich cultural heritage. At the National Museum of Bhutan, housed in a 17th-century watchtower, we'll learn about the country's history through art, textiles, and sculptures. We will also visit the Rinpung Dzong, the first dzong (traditional Bhutanese fortified monastery) on this journey. Adorned with intricate woodwork, towering walls, peaceful courtyards, and sacred temples, this impressive structure serves as both a religious site and a center of administration, offering insight into Bhutan's architectural heritage. In the evening, enjoy a traditional Bhutanese welcome dinner. If you plan to arrive before the tour begins, please note that due to Bhutan's strict tourism policies, all arrangements, including hotel stays, must be booked through a travel company (that's us!). If you need assistance with booking, please let us know, and we'll be happy to help.

Cycling Distance: 0km      Meals: Lunch, Dinner

### DAY 2 PARO TO THIMPHU WITH HIKE TO TIGER'S NEST MONASTERY

We kick off the journey with a visit to Bhutan's most iconic site: the Tiger's Nest, or Paro Taktsang as it's known locally! Perched on a cliff at 3,120 m ASL, this 17th-century Buddhist monastery is one of the most sacred and scenic sites in the Himalayan Buddhist world. After a 30-minute transfer from Paro, we begin the 4 km trek, climbing roughly 900 metres. The trail winds through forests, with gentle inclines interspersed with steeper zig-zags. Near the end, we cross a rope bridge adorned with prayer flags beside a cascading waterfall. A final set of steps leads to the monastery, where we'll explore its sacred spaces and enjoy breathtaking views. After retracing our steps down the mountain, we transfer around two-hours to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital, nestled in the green valley of the Wang Chuu River. Despite being the capital, Thimphu retains a relaxed charm, with no traffic lights in the city centre and a strong focus on preserving Bhutan's cultural heritage. The afternoon is free to relax and explore the lively town. Before reconvening for dinner, we'll make time to fit the bikes in anticipation of our inaugural ride the following day!

Cycling Distance: 0 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### DAY 3 THIMPU TO PUNAKHA

Our inaugural ride marks a rite of passage for anyone cycling in Bhutan - conquering the Dochula Pass. From Thimphu, the first 5 km are an easy warm-up as we follow the river south. Then, the climbing begins. We face 18 km of continuous uphill, with an average gradient of around 4.5%. The paved road, the only throughway between Thimphu and Punakha, winds its way up the

mountainside through sprawling forests and occasional highland settlements. We take it slow and steady until, at the top of the pass (3,100 meters ASL), we are greeted by 108 chortens – sacred Buddhist structures – rising into the sky. Here, we unwind, soak in the panoramic views of the eastern Himalayas, and enjoy lunch. Then, it's downhill into the Punakha Valley, descending over 40 km on twisty mountain roads. Our ride ends at a charming hotel near the town of Punakha, the former capital of the Kingdom.

Cycling Distance: 66 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### **DAY 4 PUNAKHA TO WANGDUE**

Today is all about the Punakha Valley, beginning with an off-saddle exploration of two of the area's most iconic sites. First, we visit the grand Punakha Dzong, one of Bhutan's most impressive dzongs, located at the confluence of two rivers, showcasing stunning architecture, intricate woodwork, and centuries of fascinating history. We then head to Chhimi Lhakhang, a scenic 15th-century hilltop monastery said to bless visitors with fertility and protection, adorned with colorful phallic symbols representing good fortune and the power to ward off evil spirits. After lunch, we change into our cycling gear and embark on a fun ride through the Punakha Valley and on to Wangdue further east. The highlight of today's route comes after just 7 km when we cross, one at a time, a swaying metal bridge over the Puna Tsang Chu River! We then follow the river south surrounded by stunning views of terraced rice paddies and towering mountains. The final 10 km are a gradual uphill as we climb into the valley of the gushing Dang Chu River where we spend the night at a cosy highland resort.

Cycling Distance: 30 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### **DAY 5 WANGDUE TO TRONGSA**

This morning, you have two choices: rise early to take on a 45 km uphill ride to the top of Pelela Pass, one of Bhutan's highest at 3,420 m ASL, or transfer by vehicle to the summit. The climb is long but steady, with gradients averaging 4–5% before steepening over the final 9 km. Whichever way you ascend, the descent is a shared thrill — a winding 30 km ride to the eastern edge of Central Bhutan. By the 70 km mark, the road flattens briefly before continuing downhill for another 18 km into the Mangde Chhu River Valley. The ride ends in Trongsa, home to Bhutan's largest dzong. Perched along a ridge overlooking the valley, this awe-inspiring fortress is famed for its labyrinth of courtyards and temples. After exploring its historic grounds, we'll unwind with some well-deserved rest and dinner.

Cycling Distance: 111 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 6 TRONGSA TO JAKAR (BUMTHANG VALLEY)**

Today marks a key milestone as we venture into the Bumthang Valley - the gateway to Eastern Bhutan. The day begins with a familiar challenge: a 30 km uphill ride to the Yongtong La Pass, at 3,450 m ASL, with a steady 4-5% gradient. At the summit, fluttering prayer flags surround a lone chorten, and on clear days, the panoramic Himalayan views are breathtaking. The descent meanders through changing forests, from subalpine to subtropical. After a lunch stop at a roadside restaurant around 50 km in, we face the second pass of the day, Kiki La Pass, a gentle 5 km climb to the top. Finally, we descend to the Bumthang River, crossing it before tackling a short, steep climb up to a classic Bhutanese lodge perched above the town of Jakar, where we'll stay for two nights.

Cycling Distance: 72 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7 BUMTHANG VALLEY EXPLORATION**

After four tough days in the saddle, today we give our legs a well-deserved rest. The morning is free to sleep in or explore Jakar, the small town that serves as the Bumthang Valley's trading hub. Bumthang is considered the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, where Buddhism first took hold in the 7th-8th centuries AD. As a result, the valley is home to many of Bhutan's most sacred temples and monasteries, including Kurje Lhakhang and Jambay Lhakhang, both of which draw pilgrims and visitors alike. We'll visit these sites at a relaxed pace in the afternoon before treating ourselves to a lovely dinner to celebrate our cycling feats so far. There's plenty more to come, so we suggest going easy on the "ara" (Bhutanese distilled liquor) this evening!

Cycling Distance: 0 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 8 JAKAR TO TANG VALLEY**

Back on our bikes, we journey from the Bumthang Valley to the remote Tang Valley, less than 40 km east. Though shorter than previous days, the ride features three mountain passes in quick succession as well as some rougher road surfaces. We'll pace ourselves, soaking in the serene ambiance of this secluded region. After our first climb at 15 km, we stop at Pema Choling Nunnery, a monastic school where Bhutanese women of all ages embrace Buddhist principles. Continuing through forested highlands, we climb and descend to the Thang Chu River leading into the pristine, agrarian Tang Valley. Amidst rice fields we'll visit a heritage house, once home to a noble family and now a museum showcasing Bhutan's feudal past. Depending on group size and availability, we'll either stay at a guesthouse attached to the heritage house or camp under the stars.

Cycling Distance: 35 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 9 TANG VALLEY TO URA VALLEY**

In the morning, you can choose between a one-hour vehicle transfer or a 23 km return ride along the same route we took yesterday. Whether by bike or car, we'll regroup near a road junction close to the sacred "Burning Lake," a site steeped in local folklore, though its name may be more dramatic than its appearance! From here, we ride southward toward the day's main challenge: a gradual 29 km climb to the top of Serthangla Pass. With an average gradient of 4-5%, find a comfortable gear, keep going, and enjoy the views as we head deeper into Bhutan's intrepid east. At the top (3,550 m ASL), we'll have a packed lunch, and on clear days, we may catch a glimpse of Gangkhar Puensum – Bhutan's highest mountain and the highest unclimbed peak in the world. From here, it's a brisk 11 km downhill into the Ura Valley, with a final section along village lanes flanked by low-rising stone walls, traditional houses, and temples. We spend the night at a farm stay in the village, embracing for a truly immersive experience in rural Bhutan off-the-beaten path.

Cycling Distance: 62 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 10 URA VALLEY TO SENGOR**

Weaving out of Ura's quaint hamlets, we quickly rejoin Bhutan's Lateral Road. The first 35 km of today's ride features two climbs: a 17 km ascent followed by a 7 km climb, with a refreshing dip between. As usual, the gradients are gentle. At the top of the second climb, we reach Thrumshing La Pass, Bhutan's second-highest mountain pass at 3,780 m ASL, where we pause to enjoy stunning views of the Donga Mountain Range (on a clear day!) and a packed lunch. The descent begins cautiously, with the road hugging a sheer drop for the first few kilometers. Soon, forests close in, and we can cruise the remainder of the route at a relaxed pace. We'll end the day in Sengor, a village nestled in a small valley surrounded by rolling hills. Depending on group size and availability, we'll either stay at a local guesthouse or camp under the stars. Being at an elevation of 3,000 m ASL, prepare to bundle up this evening!

Cycling Distance: 56 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 11 SENGOR TO MONGAR**

Unlike virtually every other day on this tour, today's ride starts with a downhill — and not just any downhill, but the longest of the entire journey! From Sengor, we wind our way down the Lateral Road for 60 km, losing 4,000 metres of elevation in the process. While the average gradient is a gentle 3% and we can cruise comfortably for most of the way, the road gets quite narrow and there are some steep stretches and tight hairpins that require focus. Around 16 km in, we pass Namling Brak, a dramatic cliff with a cascading waterfall below. After completing the descent, we ride along the Kuri Chuu River, and upon crossing a bridge to its eastern banks, we shift into

lower gears for the day's finale: a 25 km twisty climb along a series of switchbacks up to the lively town of Mongar. Time permitting you can visit Mongar Dzong, one of Bhutan's newest monasteries (built in the 1950s) but, of course, built with great adherence to traditional methods! Tonight's hotel will be a few steps up from the more simple lodgings we've experienced in the days before.

Cycling Distance: 87 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### **DAY 12 MONGAR TO TRASHIGANG**

Today's biggest climb comes right out of the gate, making our way around 18 km from Mongar up to the top of Korila Pass, another of Bhutan's memorable mountain passes, complete with a peaceful chorten and rustling prayer flags. From here, it's a nearly 40 km downhill blitz into the valley of the Dangme Chuu River, featuring an epic sequence of switchbacks towards the end. The road then undulates and winds its way atop a ridge following the river for around 20 km with scenic views into the forest-clad gorge below. After crossing a bridge to the other side, a final 9 km climb takes us towards the town of Trashigang. While shorter than many of our climbs on this tour, this is one of the spiciest, with an average gradient of 7% – feel free to opt for the support vehicle. Tonight we stay at a cosy highland resort on the outskirts of Trashigang, with fabulous views over the valley below and mountains beyond. We have now reached the easternmost point of our journey across Bhutan – a feat worth celebrating at dinner this evening!

Cycling Distance: 87 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### **DAY 13 TRASHIGANG TO WAMRONG**

We're nearing the end of our traverse across Bhutan's rugged mountains, but the climbing isn't over yet. From Trashigang, we ascend steadily for 33 km to the top of Yonphula La, home to one of Bhutan's only four regional airports. Along the way, we tackle some fiery switchbacks and pass through the area of Kanglung, with its picturesque agrarian hinterland spread across the hills. After a breather at the top, we descend slightly before remaining at an elevation of 2,000 m ASL for the rest of the ride, rising and dropping gently with the contours of the terrain. We call it a day in the small town of Wamrong, perched on a mountain ridge, where the main strip is lined with traditional Bhutanese-style houses pressed against a background of the Himalyan foothills. Depending on group size and availability, we'll either stay at a local guesthouse or camp under the stars.

Cycling Distance: 82km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 14 WAMRONG TO SAMDRUP JONGKHAR**

It's time for the home stretch! On our final riding day, we experience a remarkable change in scenery as we travel from the eastern Himalayas, over 2,000 m ASL, to the brink of the Assam Plain, near sea level. From Wamrong, the first 50 km are a series of gradual ups and downs as we make our way south, with the longest climb spanning around 15 km at a gentle 3–4% gradient. There are a few notable descents during this first half as well, but they pale in comparison to the long, winding 50 km downhill that closes out our cycling journey, bringing us to the lush tropical lowlands near the Indian border. We roll into the sleepy border town of Samdrup Jongkhar, often called the “Yellow Town” due to the hue of its architecture. In the evening, we reconvene for a well-deserved farewell dinner to celebrate our accomplishment of crossing Bhutan from west to east!

Cycling Distance: 96 km      Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 15 SAMDRUP JONGKHAR TO GUWAHATI AIRPORT (INDIA) - DEPARTURE**

Time to say goodbye to Bhutan! In the morning, we cross the border into the neighboring Indian state of Assam. Please ensure that you have your Indian visa in order – e-visas are not accepted at this border crossing, and you will need to apply for a visa physically at a consulate or embassy before joining the tour. We've done this plenty of times, so please feel free to reach out if you have any questions about the process. After completing immigration formalities, we transfer you to the city of Guwahati, located along the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra River and the largest city in Assam. It will take around 3-4 hours to get there, accounting for time at the border and traffic. Depending on your onward arrangements, we will either drop you off at the airport or your post-tour hotel in Guwahati. Please book flights in the afternoon to allow enough time to reach the airport.

Cycling Distance: 0km      Meals: Breakfast

## INCLUDED IN THE TOUR

- Accommodation: mainly 3 star hotels with traditional amenities & 2 guesthouses or campsites
- Airport arrival transfer (day 1)
- Airport departure transfer (day 15)
- Meals as listed in the itinerary
- Local English speaking riding guide(s)
- Vehicle(s) for transport and general support
- Drinking water and snacks while riding

## NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR

- International & domestic flights, airport taxes
- Visas
- Surcharge for single room
- Bike hire (mountain bike or e-bike)
- Optional activity costs
- Personal expenses and drinks (except water while riding)
- Travel insurance
- Tips for guide(s) and support crew

## TOUR GRADE 4: HARD

This is an advanced-level cycling challenge, ideal for seasoned riders or determined intermediate cyclists who crave the burn of gradual ascents and relish the thrill of winding descents. Stamina is essential for back-to-back riding days, and strength is required to tackle a range of climbing conditions. Most ascents feature a gentle gradient of 3-5%, with steeper sections being rare. Riders should be comfortable gaining 1,500–2,000 metres of elevation daily, with the resilience to push their limits on a few more demanding days. Good handling skills are key for safely navigating steep downhills with sharp turns. Although we do not venture off-road, the varying conditions of the paved surfaces demand focus and adaptability. Less experienced riders are welcome but should prepare in advance for the long distances, sustained climbs, and occasional rough roads. A support vehicle is always nearby to provide refuge for weary cyclists or assistance with any climbs.

We primarily ride along the “Lateral Road,” Bhutan’s primary east-west highway, which meanders through the country’s majestic mountains and valleys. Despite its highway designation, the Lateral Road is a narrow, winding route with minimal traffic, especially as we venture away from the main tourist hubs. However, be prepared to share the road with a mix of vehicles, including

cars, motorbikes, and occasional buses. Road surface conditions vary. While many sections are well-maintained, broken asphalt, potholes, and road debris are common. Rain is typical in Bhutan throughout the year and can impact road conditions. We generally ride rain or shine, but based on the guide's discretion or your level of comfort, modifications to the planned route can be made. It's all part of the adventure.

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