

BLACK NECKED CRANES

Entry: Paro

Exit: Paro

Duration: 6 Days

Districts: Paro, Thimphu, Wangduephodrang

In an expedition of the protected Phobjikha valley, you will be brought closest to one of the world's most endangered birds, the Black-necked Cranes (*Grus nigricollis*), you will also witness how people live in harmony with the birds. You will be thrilled by the sight of the birds greet the people upon their arrival from Tibet and Mongolia, beginning late October. The birds live in Phobjikha till late February. Apart from the birds and the beauty of Phobjikha (also called the 'Gangtey Valley'), what will stun you is the way the cranes greet Gangtey Monastery upon arrival. The birds circle the monastery and bow three times, which people say is an act of paying obeisance to the deities of the monastery. The same is repeated when they fly back from Phobjikha.

Day 1

Bangkok/ Delhi/ Katmandu - Paro

You will land at Paro international Airport, after having experienced one of the most thrilling journeys of your lifetime – the flight to Paro, during which you experience a breath taking view of Mount Everest, Kanchenjunga and other famous Himalayan peaks, including the sacred Jomolhari and Mount Jichu Drake. The landing at Paro, considered one of the most challenging is an enthralling experience. At the airport, you will be received by our company's representatives and driven to your hotel. After checking in and a quick lunch, you will explore Paro valley, known for its beautiful paddy fields and historic monuments. You will visit Drugyel Dzong, "Fortress of the Victorious Drukpa", the ruined Fort (destroyed by fire in 1950.) which once defended this valley from Tibetan invasion. From here one can have the view of sacred Mt. Jomolhari on clear days. On the way back to the hotel you can stop for a view of Taktsang (tiger's nest) Monastery which clings on a sheer drop of rock face where the saint Guru Padma-sambhava landed on a flying tigress and mediated. Other places you can visit are the Ta Dzong, formerly a Watch Tower which now is the National Museum and Paro Rimpong Dzong. After a short stroll in town drive back to hotel for the night halt.

Day 2

Paro- Thimphu

It is an exciting one-hour drive along the Pa Chhu (river) and Thimphu Chhu (river). Upon arrival at Thimphu, we will check into our hotel and then begin visiting the capital's epitomes of greatness.

Thimphu has lots to offer and the pick for you will firstly be the Memorial Chorten, one of Bhutan's most beautiful stupas, built in memory of the Third King, Late His Majesty Jigmi Dorji Wangchuck, known as the Father of Modern Bhutan. A short drive from there will take you to Buddha Point, where the statue of the World's largest Future Buddha (Maitreya) will be seen. From there we will move to the Handicraft's Emporium, Weaving Centre and Changangkha monastery, one built in the 12th century. There will also be visits to the Takin zoo, Sangaygang, which offers a view point of Thimphu valley and a Nunnery. Lunch will be served at a local restaurant, after which we visit the National Library where ancient manuscripts are preserved and the Wood Craft and Painting school. We will also visit the Traditional Handmade paper factory and the Gross National Happiness (GNH) centre. In the evening, we will visit Tashichhodzong, the main secretariat building. This massive structure houses part of the government Ministries, the office of the King and the Throne Room. It also houses the State Monastic Body and the living quarters of the Chief Abbot and the senior monks.

Overnight in hotel.

Day 3

Thimphu - Gangtey

After breakfast, our journey to Phobjikha, (127 kms) begins. The journey will take you through some of Bhutan's most beautiful roads and Dochula pass (3,100 m), from where one can see the entire Himalayan range of snow clapped mountains if the day is clear. Lunch will be served at Wangduephodrang. After lunch, we continue the journey to Phobjikha. Phobjikha is a wide alpine wetland valley that is considered the largest and the most significant wetland in the country. It is often cited for the harmonious co-existence of its inhabitants with nature and the valley also holds great cultural significance. The valley is the most significant wintering ground of the rare and endangered Black-necked cranes in Bhutan and has been protected since time immemorial by the local people's traditional respect for all living beings. Every year, over 300 of the estimated 500 cranes that migrate to Bhutan spend their winter months in this valley. Additionally, the highly revered Gangtey Monastery that overlooks the wetlands surrounded by subsistence farms and natural forest areas makes Phobjikha a stunningly beautiful and sacred valley. Today, this glacial valley is an attraction not just to tourists but also pilgrims.

Overnight in camp, Alt. 3,900 m or hotel

Day 4

Halt at Phobjikha

You can dedicate the whole day to embark on a mission of getting to know Phobjikha and the cranes. An interesting aspect of the region is the way in which development and conservation have been blended together; an example to the world. You can stroll around Gangtey Goemba and get to know the local people. Overnight in camp/hotel.

Day 5

Phobjikha - Thimphu/Paro

Your journey back to Thimphu or Paro begins. En-route we will stop at Lamperi botanical garden, which is a few kilometres drive before reaching Dochula Pass. The garden has several species of flowers, rhododendrons being the most explicit ones. We will have our lunch at Lamperi and then drive either to Thimphu or Paro. Night halt at hotel.

Day 6

Departure from Paro

After an early breakfast, you will be driven to the airport for your departure from the country. The Black-necked Crane Festival The Annual Black-necked Crane festival is celebrated in the courtyard of Gangtey Gonpa, in Phobjikha valley. The festival is an occasion for the locals to rejoice and celebrate the arrival of this endangered and majestic bird which becomes an inseparable part their daily lives during the winter months. It is organized to generate awareness and understanding on the importance of conserving the cranes; to strengthen the linkages between conservation, economic welfare and sustainable livelihoods of the community; provide an avenue for the local community to renew their commitment to conservation of the black-necked cranes, and to showcase their cultural heritage and skills. The festival includes cultural programs such as folk songs and dances (some with black-necked crane themes) and mask dances performed by the local people, crane dances and environmental conservation-themed dramas and songs by the school children. The festival is organized by the

Phobjikha Environment Management Committee (PEMC), a local group composed of elected local leaders (with a strong female component), Government representatives, business community representatives, monks and Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) representative.

You can contact us for more details on the festival.