Bhutan

Highlights of Spring



Blood Pheasant by David Hoddinott

Bhutan remains one of the least spoiled and most culturally intact countries in the Himalayas. Cloaked in vast forests, scattered with ancient monasteries and fortress-like dzongs, and framed by snow-capped peaks, this remarkable kingdom offers some of the most spectacular birding scenery anywhere in Asia.

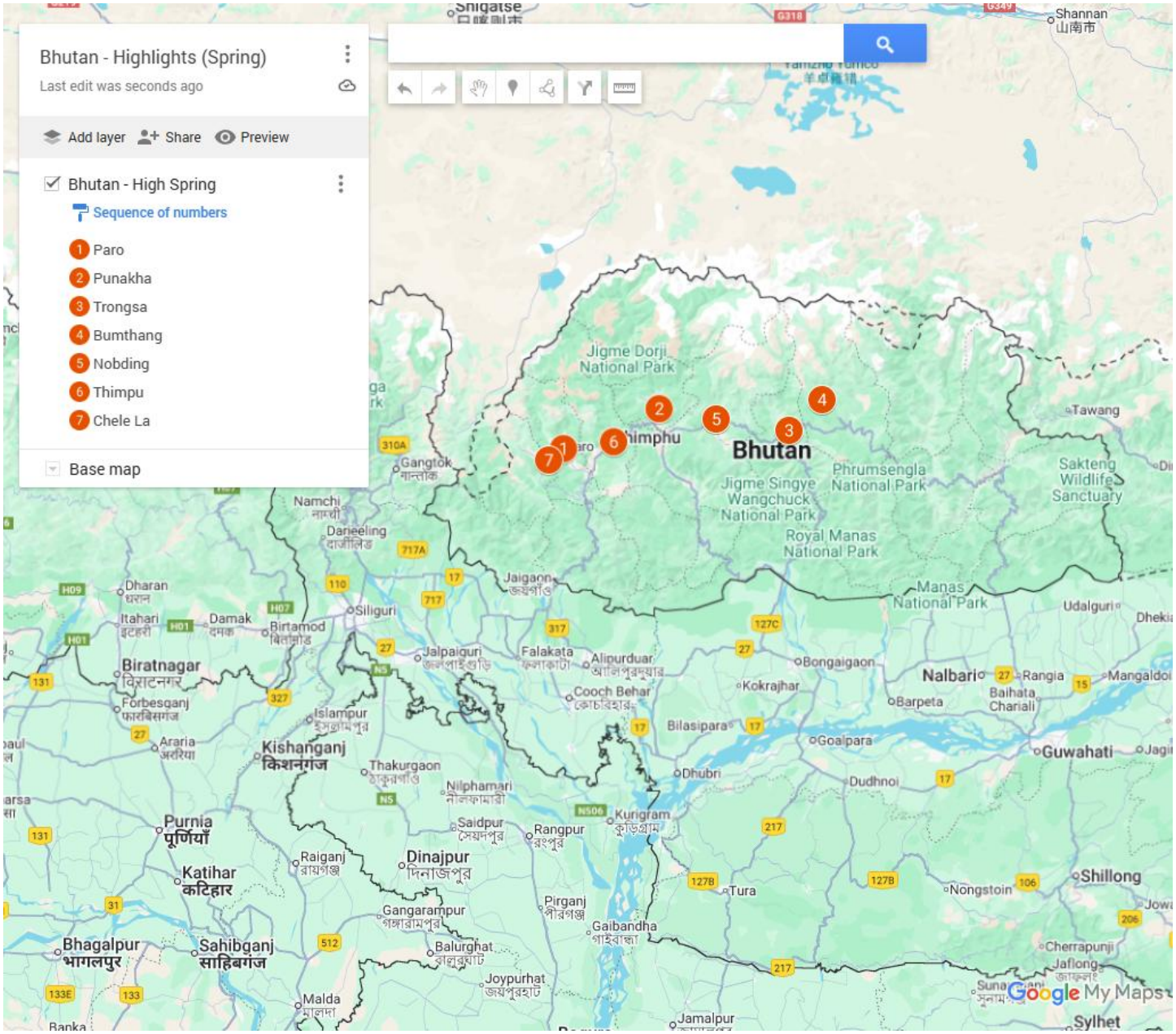
Our journey through this Himalayan wonderland takes us from subtropical river valleys to high mountain passes draped in colourful prayer flags, traversing a remarkable range of habitats in search of an exceptional diversity of birds. Along the way we will explore pristine broad-leaved and coniferous forests, scenic alpine slopes and fast-flowing rivers while searching for a host of Himalayan specialities, including Himalayan Monal, Satyr Tragopan, Ward's Trogon, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Beautiful Rosefinch, White-bellied Heron and the dazzling Fire-tailed Sunbird.

Beyond the birding, Bhutan's unique Buddhist culture remains deeply woven into everyday life. Impressive dzongs, remote monasteries and traditional villages all contribute to the distinctive atmosphere of this extraordinary country, while dramatic mountain scenery provides a constant backdrop throughout the tour.

This itinerary has also been specifically designed to maximise comfort, with all nights spent in hotel accommodation, no camping required.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Paro**
Day 2	**Paro to Punakha via Dochu La**
Day 3	**Tashitang Valley**
Day 4	**Punakha to Trongsa**
Day 5	**Trongso to Bumthang**
Day 6	**Bumthang**
Day 7	**Bumthang to Trongsa**
Day 8	**Trongsa to Nobding**
Day 9	**Nobding**
Day 10	**Nobding to Thimphu**
Day 11	**Thimphu to Paro**
Day 12	**Chele La**
Day 13	**Final departure**


Bhutan - Highlights (Spring)
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Bhutan - High Spring
Sequence of numbers
1 Paro
2 Punakha
3 Trongsa
4 Bumthang
5 Nobding
6 Thimpu
7 Chele La
Base map
Bhutan
Jigme Dorji National Park
Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park
Phrumsengla National Park
Royal Manas National Park
Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary
Manas National Park
Tawang
Gangtok
Namchi
Darjeeling
Siliguri
Jaigaon
Jalpaiguri
Falakata
Alipurduar
Cooch Behar
Kokrajhar
Bongaigaon
Nalbari
Barpeta
Rangia
Goalpara
Guwahati
Dhubri
Dudhnoi
Biratnagar
Forbesganj
Araria
Kishanganj
Islampur
Thakurgaon
Nilphamari
Purnia
Katihar
Raiganj
Dinajpur
Saidpur
Rangpur
Kurigram
Gangarampur
Pirganj
Gaibandha
Tura
Nongstoin
Shillong
Cherrapunji
Jaflong
Bhagalpur
Sahibganj
Balurghat
Joypurhat
Malda
Jamalpur
Sylhet
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Birding sites in detail

Dochu La. The higher slopes of scenic Dochu La harbour excellent birds such as the radiant Fire-tailed Myzornis, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Ward's Trogon, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, White-browed Fulvetta and Spotted Nutcracker and, if we are especially fortunate, a flock of Fulvous Parrotbills may even make an appearance. If the day is clear, the lofty pass affords outstanding views of the surrounding Himalayan peaks, several of which exceed 7,500m. Prayer flags draped across the pass add to the visual splendour of this spectacular Himalayan setting.



Ward's Trogon by David Hoddinott

Punakha Valley. Situated at 1,250m above sea level, the Punakha Valley has an almost tropical feel. Time permitting, we'll visit the avian-rich Royal Botanical Park on the lower slopes of Dochu La, where a host of fabulous birds can be found. Highlights could include Darjeeling and Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers, Crimson-browed Finch, Himalayan Bluetail, Ibisbill, Spot-winged Starling, Slender-billed Oriole, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Grey-winged and White-collared Blackbirds, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Ultramarine Flycatcher, Sikkim Treecreeper, Spot-winged Grosbeak, Fire-capped Tit, Green-tailed and Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds, Snowy-browed Flycatcher and the shy Hill Partridge.

Tashitang Valley. We'll bird the lovely broad-leaved subtropical forest along the swift Mo Chhu River within the vast Jigme Dorji National Park. Species we will search for along this route include the highly threatened White-bellied Heron, now tragically scarce in the region, Tawny Fish Owl, Himalayan Swiftlets hawking overhead, Crested Kingfisher, Great and Golden-throated Barbets, Bay Woodpecker, Mountain Hawk-Eagle, Mountain Bulbul, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Short-billed Minivets, Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Small Niltava, Pale-blue, Dark-sided, Slaty-backed and Ferruginous Flycatchers, Hodgson's Redstart, the skulking Himalayan Shortwing, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch and Chestnut-tailed Starling.



Himalayan Monal by David Hoddinott

Our route passes the impressive fortress monastery of Punakha Dzong, a magnificent reminder of Bhutan's deep Buddhist heritage. This was the second dzong constructed in Bhutan and served as the seat of government until the reign of the second king. Our lodge is

situated outside the city on a hill overlooking the Punakha Valley and its spectacular dzong.

Trongsa. Here we will have the opportunity to visit the spectacular Trongsa Dzong, ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family. Wide stone stairways and enchanting courtyards provide access to the elaborate interior, where resident monks continue their daily rituals. Located high above the Mangde Chhu, Trongsa contains one of Bhutan's most magnificent dzongs, renowned for its striking architecture, rich history and golden roofs gleaming across the valley. The surrounding broad-leaved evergreen forest holds specialities such as the boldly patterned Spotted Forktail, Grey-bellied Tesia and Spotted Elachura, now placed within its own monotypic family.

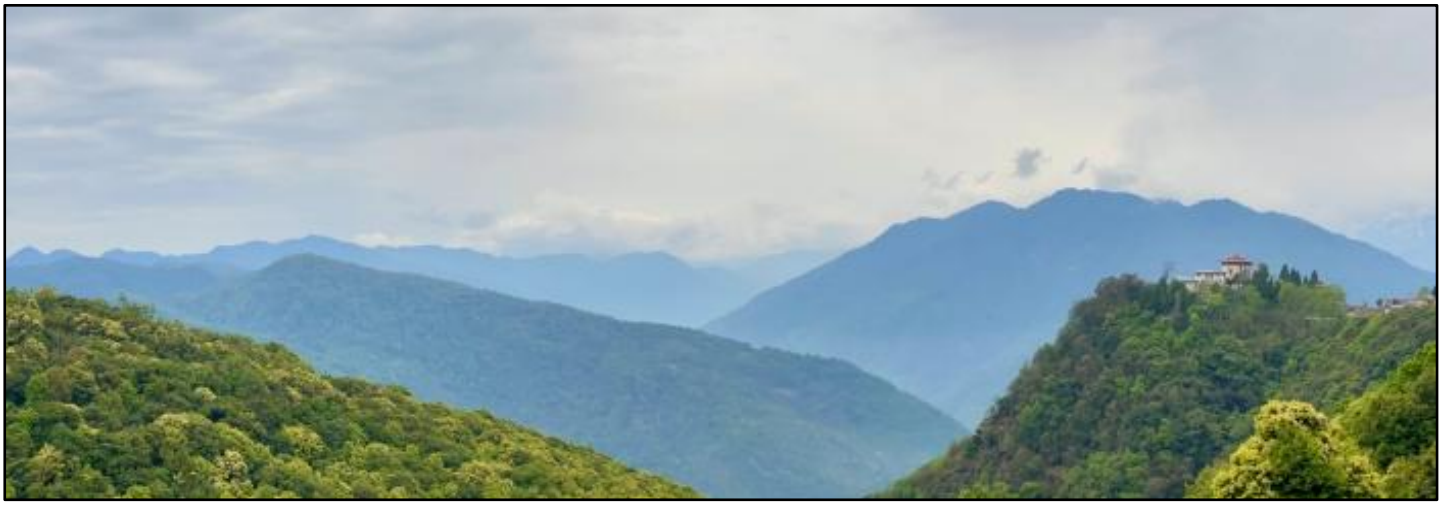


Great Parrotbill by Daniel Danckwerts

Bumthang. Our spectacular drive to Bumthang winds through pristine hillside forests, prayer-flag-lined passes and traditional villages framed by snow-capped peaks. On exceptionally clear days we may even glimpse Bhutan's highest mountain, Gangkar Puensum, rising to 7,541m and still regarded as the highest unclimbed mountain on Earth.

Our journey passes through numerous small villages and goembas settled neatly within the Chume Valley. Here we will search for the secretive Brown Parrotbill and the localised Beautiful Rosefinch.

Yotongla Pass. We'll bird the high-altitude coniferous forests at approximately 3,400m for Himalayan Vulture, Red Crossbill, Coal, Rufous-vented and Grey-crested Tits, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Spotted Nutcracker, White-browed and Dark-rumped Rosefinches, White-browed Fulvetta, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Alpine Accentor, Hoary-throated Barwing and Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler.



Bhutan scenery by Forrest Rowland

Tharpaling Monastery. This high, often snowbound monastery offers excellent opportunities for Satyr Tragopan, Blood Pheasant and Himalayan Monal, while we may also encounter Snow Pigeon, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Large-eared Pika, Beautiful Rosefinch, Plain Mountain Finch, Little Bunting, Red-billed Chough and Black-rumped Magpie.



Spotted Laughingthrush by Julian Parsons

Bumthang to Nobding. Many species inhabit the mixed conifer and rhododendron forests high in the mountains, and today we'll spend time exploring this habitat in search of Spotted and Scaled Laughingthrushes, Himalayan Shortwing, Hume's Bush Warbler, Grey-sided Bush Warbler, Gold-naped Finch, Scaly-breasted Cupwing and Fire-tailed Sunbird.

Pele La. We may encounter the gregarious Snow Pigeon and the sought-after Satyr Tragopan here. Other species include Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler, White-spectacled Warbler, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Rufous-fronted Bushtit, Great Parrotbill, Golden Bush Robin, Long-tailed Minivet, Green-tailed Sunbird and the skulking Grey-sided Bush Warbler.

The top of the pass may yield White-winged and Collared Grosbeaks, Himalayan Vulture, Himalayan Monal, Spotted Laughingthrush, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Northern Goshawk and excellent views of



Satyr Tragopan by David Hoddinott

Bearded Vulture. Mammals could include Royle's Pika and Northern Red Muntjac. Nearby areas may also produce Brown Parrotbill, Little Bunting and Pin-tailed Snipe.



Fire-tailed Sunbird by David Hoddinott

Phobjikha Valley. Set against the dramatic backdrop of the Black Mountains, this scenic valley hosts avian gems such as Mrs. Gould's Sunbird, Blood Pheasant, Green Shrike-Babbler and Spotted Laughingthrush.

Thimpu to Paro. This morning we embark on the scenic drive towards Paro. The route traverses drier habitat where Himalayan Bulbul, Green-billed Malkoha, Orange-bellied Leafbird and Speckled Wood Pigeon may be encountered before we reach the icy rivers of the valley. Here we can search for Brown Dipper alongside striking White-capped and Plumbeous Water Redstarts.

We then visit the world-renowned Tiger's Nest Monastery. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the monastery was built in 1692 on a sheer cliff face at 3,120m above sea level. Clinging dramatically above the valley floor, it remains one of Bhutan's most iconic and unforgettable sights!

Chele La. Situated in the forest-cloaked hills above Paro, Chele La is probably the finest place in the world to see the dazzling Himalayan Monal, surely one of the Himalayas' most spectacular birds. Additional pheasants may include Blood Pheasant, Kalij Pheasant and Satyr Tragopan. Other species possible here include Darjeeling



Tiger's Nest Monastery by Julian Parsons

Woodpecker, White-browed Rosefinch, Red-headed Bullfinch, Collared and White-winged Grosbeaks, Plain Mountain Finch, Goldcrest, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Long-tailed Thrush, Spotted Laughingthrush and perhaps even a motionless Eurasian Woodcock concealed on the forest floor.

Paro. We will spend a short time searching along the Paro Chu for the secretive Black-tailed Crake, Pin-tailed Snipe, Rosy Pipit and one of the most sought-after shorebirds in the world – the beautiful Ibisbill! This elegant wader, placed in its own monotypic family, is often found here while it searches for food amongst the boulders of fast-flowing streams in the region.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Suitable for all birding and wildlife interest levels, though participants should be comfortable with some walking at altitude.
Birding Ease		Most species are usually seen well, often in relatively open conditions.
Accommodation		All nights in comfortable hotel lodging. Some nights at high elevation (2 500 – 3 000m / 8 400 – 10 000ft)
Walking / Trails		Mostly easy roadside birding, some moderate uphill walks. One moderate (optional) hike to Tiger's Nest
Vehicles / Roads		Mountainous terrain means many roads are winding & may be challenging for those prone to motion sickness.
Photography		Average to good. No dedicated hides. Good cultural photo opportunities.
Annoyances		Weather can be cold to very cold. Expect occasional rain & even snow. Winding roads / high altitude may prove challenging.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- Bhutan Visa Fees,
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees (except as noted above);
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

Highlights Tours offer a full birding experience in a shorter timeframe, focusing on the destination's key birding sites and species. They retain the pace and intensity of our Classic tours, including early starts, long field days and night birding where necessary. They are not designed to be easier, slower or more relaxed. Rather than attempting comprehensive coverage, we concentrate on the most important sites and a strong selection of priority species. They are ideal for birders seeking a rewarding, focused birding experience with limited time available.

- Please be aware that several of the mountain passes we traverse reach altitudes of around 13,000 feet. These elevations may cause altitude-related discomfort for some guests, and temperatures can be very cold, particularly in exposed areas. Rain and occasional snowfall are also possible during parts of the tour. If you have any concerns regarding altitude, please inform the Rockjumper office well in advance of departure. In contrast, conditions in the southern parts of the country can at times be hot and humid, with strong sun and high UV exposure increasing the risk of sunburn.
- While the food is generally very good and flavourful, the variety of dishes can occasionally be limited, particularly in more remote areas. Meals may also be fairly spicy at times. Please advise us of any dietary requirements well in advance of the tour.
- Bhutan remains relatively untouched by mass tourism and the local people are renowned for their friendliness and courtesy. It is considered inappropriate to hand out sweets, money or other items to children or local bystanders encountered during the tour. Your sensitivity and respect for local customs are greatly appreciated.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour starts in on the afternoon of day 1 in Paro, Bhutan and will conclude here after breakfast on day 13.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Paro Airport, Paro (IATA: PBH) Bhutan, is the main port of arrival and departure for the main tour, it is well connected to larger cities such as New Delhi (India) or Bangkok (Thailand) with Druk Air.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.