

BHUTAN

PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR EWEN BELL + IAN ROLFE

Dancing Monks and winter light in the kingdom where happiness meets wisdom.

Softly softly in the land of the Thunder Dragon. A journey from festivals to farmers with intimate moments and fabulous photography. Come and find out why we regard Bhutan as such a treasured experience, and why the people of Bhutan are the happiest on earth.

November 19 - December 03, 2023

15 days from US\$10,288









BHUTAN ITINERARY

Day 1 | Thimphu

We arrange to arrive in Paro on the same day, via connections from Bangkok, Singapore or Kathmandu. Our team in Bhutan can handle this, along with the visa arrangements.

On arrival in Paro we have a slow drive through the countryside to reach Thimphu, and usually make a few stops on the way. Normally this drive takes about 1 hour, but with a group of photographers we like to take all afternoon. Once in Thimphu we'll get acclimated to the pace of life in Bhutan and visit some local spots for photography and discussion. Aside from acclimating to the Bhutanese culture, Thimphu has some beautiful temples to visit and will help us prepare for the cultural immersion of Central Bhutan.

Days 2-3 | Punakha

Punakha is home to one of the most beautiful Dzongs in all of Bhutan can be found, along with some stunning villages and beautiful rivers. We have the option of an early morning hike to watch the sunrise across the rice fields.

Days 4-6 | Phobjikha

This secluded valley gets really cold at night but we'll be cosy in a farmhouse with log fires and hot stone baths. The valley still continues with a very basic rural style and offers us a chance to really slow down and contemplate the art of photography. This is home to the potato farmers and the Black Necked Crane, which will be starting to arrive in the valley for winter and are easily observed from a distance.

Day 7 | Trongsa

This drive is beautiful and dramatic with lots of scenic stops along the way. Trongsa is a major highlight of the journey with my favourite Dzong of all Bhutan dominating the view. The chance to see monks engaged in their traditions is excellent, and there's often a chance to see monkeys engaged in mischief too.

Days 8-12 | Bumthang

Bumthang is worth visiting regardless of festivals, but the presence of two unique festival events on the calendar makes it even better. No two festivals

in Bhutan are the same and each day of dance is a new experience and new opportunity. They are spectacular, and a little challenging. We'll have time to talk about techniques plus reviews to help us advance our skills and try again the next day. There are many other around the Jakar valley and we'll have a chance to visit some of the quiet ones.

Days 13-14 | Paro

We return back to Paro for a little pampering in the most scenic valley Bhutan has to offer. We'll get up close to the scenery in a serious way by ascending the trail to the Tigers Nest. The Tigers Nest is remarkable, a fitting highlight to finish our journey.

Day 15 | Departure

Wave goodbye at the airport. Connecting flights can be made via Singapore, Bangkok or Kathmandu.

BHUTAN ITINERARY

1

Experience

Bhutan and the Himalayas have been a backdrop to my career in photography, travel and mentoring. This part of the world is a huge part of my life.

2

Happiness

Travel in Bhutan is not just about photography, it's an experience. When you love the place and the people it shows in your photography.

3

Photo Love

I want you to go home with some incredible photos and I do my best to get you to the right places and offer the right advice. Sharing is caring!

4

Festivals

We select our tour dates to match up with remote festivals far from the tourist trail. A powerful cultural experience and rich photographic inspiration.

5

Team Bhutan

One of the reasons this is such a great tour is because I have a great team behind me. These journeys are not just about photography – it takes a whole team who care about your journey.

6

Luxe Himalayas

We have some really lovely accommodation on this trip, ranging from a cosy family run guesthouse to a luxury resort and spa. Some of the upgrades we keep hush about so we don't spoil the surprises!







THE WINTER LIGHT

I really love the Himalayan winters. The angle of light in winter offers beautiful photographic moments all day long, not just at dawn and dusk. This is also the dry time of year for Bhutan, so there's less humidity and plenty of sunshine.

We don't travel to serious altitude in Bhutan, and it's very rare that the high passes we drive over are impacted by snow.

Evenings can be very cool, even down to zero. But once the sunlight comes over the mountains it's wonderful and you can often get around without even a jacket. Our accommodation is always toasty warm at night, sometimes too warm if you have a wood fire going, and never any issues with recharging batteries or getting a hot shower!



ABOUT THE FESTIVALS

Festivals are an expression of community, not just the temple. Every temple holds one festival each year to invite good fortune to the villagers and drive away the bad spirits. They are deeply spiritual, and as guests in Bhutan we need to be mindful of showing suitable respect.

Every tour I run in Bhutan is carefully timed to coincide with one or more festivals. They are scheduled on the lunar calendar, and dates often shuffle a little. This is why most tour dates in Bhutan are not planned more than a year in advance.

I'm very cautious about choosing a festival for my tours. I steer away from the easy to access locations, because there might be more tourists than Bhutanese. With few exceptions, we are certain to encounter other travellers however. Typically they don't stay long and then we're the only foreigners for miles around. By being patient and taking our time, we end up with better photos and a few extra blessings from the monks!









TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Extended visits to Bhutan's most majestic of Dzongs
- Sunrise above the rice fields and terraces
- Black-necked Cranes in Phobjikha Valley
- Private blessings with a Lama
- Enjoy the very best of local cuisine
- Freshly made momos at local truckstops
- Rivers and waterfalls for slow shutter photography
- Walking through farming villages
- Winter light and sunny skies
- An abundance of birdlife if you enjoy that challenge
- Sacred chams at festivals performed by monks
- Exploration of the cultural heritage and Buddhist origins
- The challenging walk to reach Tigers Nest (Taktsang)
- Breath in the Himalayan air at high passes (such as Dochu La and Pele La)

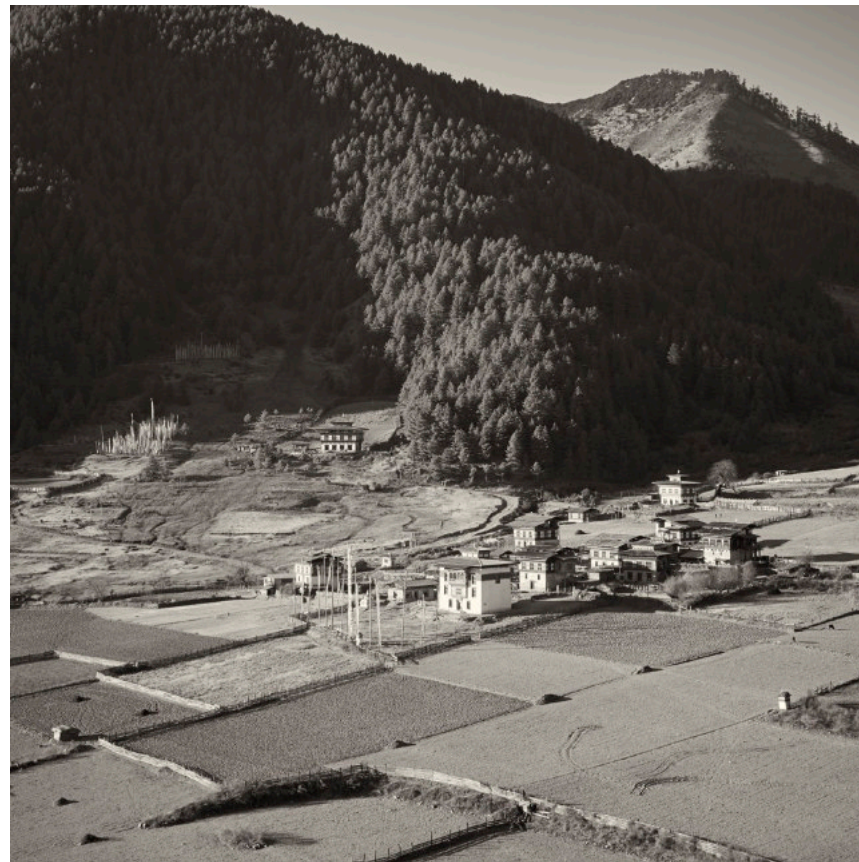


HIMALAYAS WITHOUT THE HIKES

This tour is for photographers, not trekkers. There is walking to reach the highest temples, but the tour design is comfortable, achievable and carefully balanced to suit the needs of photographers who want to stop every hour and take pictures on a whim. Enjoyment of walking is essential to photography in Bhutan, but we don't do any overnight treks.

The hardest section is the walk to Tigers Nest, planned for the very end of the tour. You'll have had time to adjust to the elevation by this stage and we do a few very short hikes before then to prepare for the terrain. Coming back down the hill is the difficult part, with big steps that can be tough on the knees.

In Bhutan we say *Goley Goley*, or to travel "slowly slowly". It's good advice.



EDITORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Nobody wants to visit Bhutan without attending a festival, but there's a lot more to photographing Bhutanese culture than their dancing monks. The everyday moments are what I treasure most about Bhutan.

Light catching the incense during prayer. Farmers selling sundried chillies at the market. Making a pot of yak-butter tea over the fire.

I am an editorial photographer, which means I have spent my career telling the story. It's not the image that matters most, but what the image represents. The scenes you see in this brochure are all captured while on tour. They are genuine. Nothing here is staged with stand-ins or setup in a studio – it's the real Bhutan and real moments.













CAMERA GEAR

Before the tour begins we'll discuss what gear you need to pack to make the most of this adventure. The right choice of lenses and a decent laptop will ensure you're fully prepared for some special moments.

Whatever camera you have, I can help you get the most of it. I've been writing for photography magazines and reviewing cameras for nearly a decade now.

The emphasis for this trip is the wide angle opportunities, both for landscape and festivals. For those who enjoy a little wildlife we'll get to see the Black-necked cranes in Phobjikha Valley, plus I can show you some of the smaller birds that might be harder to find.

There are a few rivers and streams that will appeal for slow shutter work as well, but this is not the major focus for this particular tour.



PROFESSIONAL TUITION

Not only is this adventure designed to deliver exceptional photographic opportunities, but you get a professional photographer included too.

I've been running photographic workshops and tours since 2005. My experience with the camera and teaching is matched only by my passion for creating bespoke photographic experiences.

Every detail of the craft is open to discussion. My style is to emphasise the creative potential of photography without getting mired in the technical. I will push you to be in control of the camera, to make the images your own, but for the sake of creativity and expression.









BLACK-NECKED CRANES

These guys are kind of a big deal. Migratory cranes that breed in the far north of China, they come to Bhutan in the winter where the conditions are very mild and relatively safe. Marshes in the middle of the valley do a good job of slowing down the leopards.

In recent years they have flocked to Phobjikha Valley and numbers are growing. We'll visit the crane research centre to learn a little about them, and make sure we're out early in the morning to catch them as they spread across the valley in search of food and warmth.

If you're serious about your wildlife you'll need a decent telephoto lens. At least 400mm. If not, you'll enjoy the morning light with a wide angle lens amongst the potato farming villages :)



BIRDS IN BHUTAN

This is NOT a wildlife tour! I have run a private adventure to Bhutan before, just for birds and wildlife, and there certainly is a lot to enjoy in the Himalayas if that's your jam!

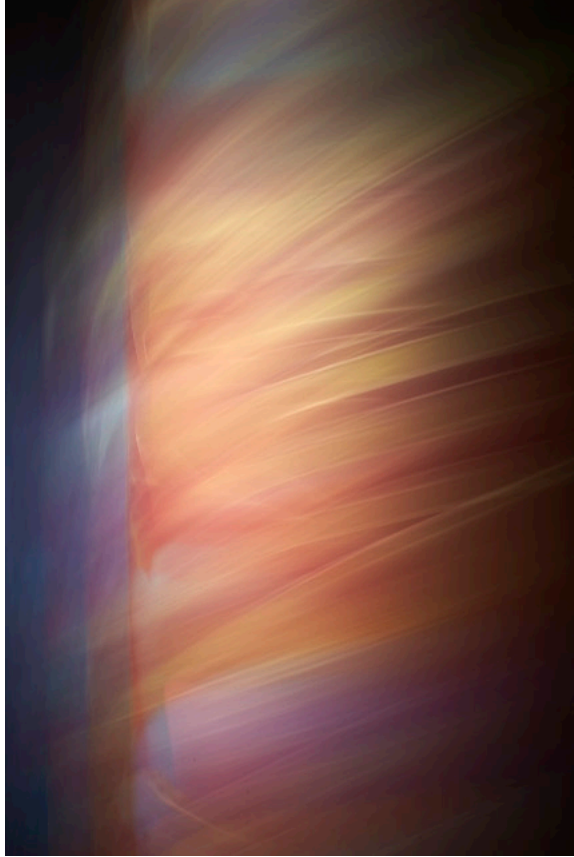
While this tour is not for birding, I am happy to spend a little time helping my guests get closer to some beautiful feathered friends. They're not hard to find at all during our travels. Even our hotel grounds present some great opportunities.

If you are interested to dip your toe in the water with Bhutanese birds, make sure to chat with me before the tour begins and plan to pack a nice long lens. I'm always happy to share some time helping you get started.

You can learn more about what birds we might see by downloading the following PDF:

ewenbell.com/bb-pdf









ART & CREATIVITY

The camera is like a paintbrush, and in the hands of different people it will produce very different images.

I specialise in teaching people about the creative potential of photography, to go beyond the technical issues of a camera and start taking creative control. Expression is at the heart of great photography, sharing your perspective, your view, your experience.

I'm also the author of the book "ReIMAGINE - changing your photography by changing your perspective"

A few basic principles underpin the art of travel photography. Go Slow. Get Closer. Look for the Light. Find out for yourself how much inspiration can flow from three very simple ideas.

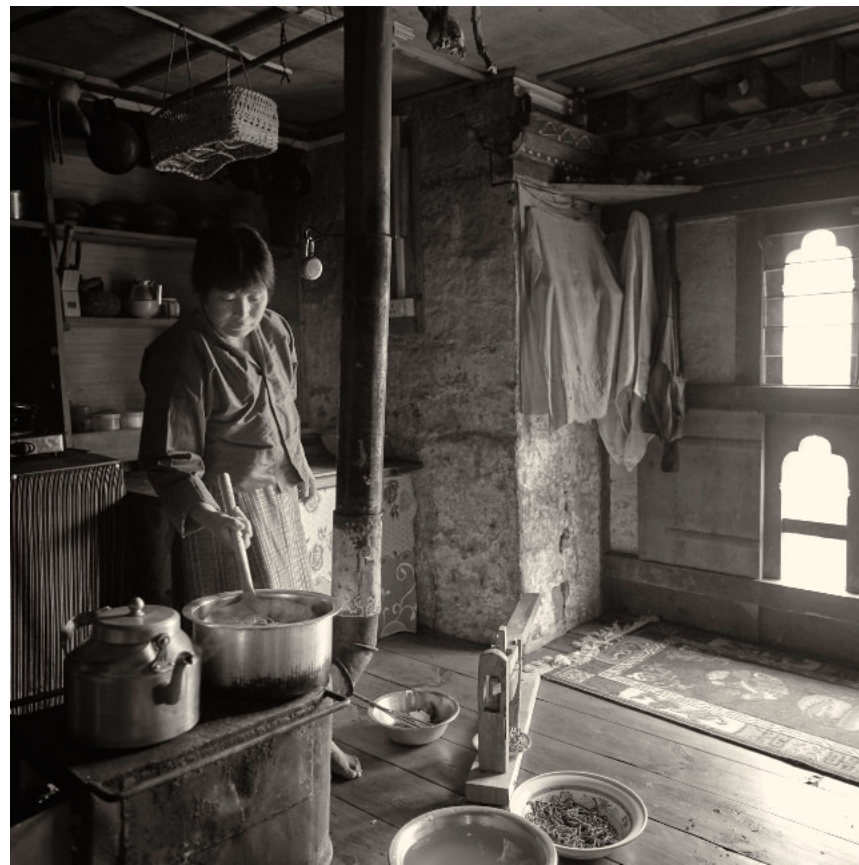


BHUTANESE FOOD

Bhutanese cuisine is dominated by yak cheese and chilli, but don't be fooled into thinking you need to opt for "bland" to avoid the "spicy". There is a lot of really great local cuisine on offer and our local team know how to make sure my groups get a chance to enjoy it.

I've been running tours here for over a decade and have worked hard to side-step the "tourist" food. Sometimes we eat at truck stops, other times we have secret local restaurants where the chicken curry is so good you'll want it again. Often we pack a picnic for the drive so we can stop as the photography schedule dictates.

At the festivals we go hard on local stalls and make the most of hand-made momos. I've literally published articles on the food in Bhutan, and I'll do my best to ensure you go home having enjoyed it.









WHO TRAVELS WITH US?

Our photographic journeys appeal to both the young and old, the experienced and novice. Most tours are made up of people aged 25 to 65, and occasionally older or younger still. It doesn't matter what your skills and interest in photography are, you will enjoy sharing a creative and immersive experience with like minded people.

You can read feedback from past travellers, going back over a decade, on photography tours by visiting this link below...

ewenbell.com/feedback



MEET EWEN BELL

YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE

My name is Ewen Bell and I'm the guy who designs these tours so you can get great photos and experience a marvellous adventure. My work is published all over the world in travel brochures, the travel media and photography magazines including National Geographic in the USA and Food & Travel in the UK. My depth of experience with leading tours is impressive, with over 50 tours and workshops completed in recent decades across Asia, The Himalayas, Australia, Antarctica and Scandinavia.

"The people of Bhutan are deeply proud of their country and culture. Rightly so. Hidden away in these Himalayan valleys are communities that embody a sustainable lifestyle in harmony with the landscape. Happiness is earned here."

It's kind of weird talking about myself and "selling" myself to you here! But really, I do know a thing or two about photography and how to teach photography. Perhaps most importantly, I care about making sure YOU go home with great photos.

ewenbell.com



MEET IAN ROLFE

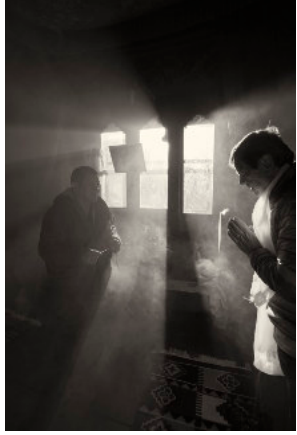
YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE

Ian has travelled extensively in Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Scandinavia, Europe, The Himalayas, South-East Asia, North America and much of the Pacific regions, where he has built up an extensive photo library, which is used by various media outlets world-wide.

His travel and landscape photography became well known over twenty years ago when his column started to appear in the Photo-master and Total Image magazines. Since then his work has been published in countless books, Photography magazines and travel brochures and his images are currently represented by the world's largest photo Libraries. Ian also conducts around six Photographic workshops each year both locally and internationally. He also gives lectures and presentations at Clubs and Societies to help members who are passionate about developing further in their photographic knowledge and skills. Ian is a Grand Master of Photography APS, an Associate of the AIPP and currently serves as President of the Victorian Association of Photographic Societies.

ianrolfelightscares.com
ianrolfephotography.net







ALL INCLUSIVE

What We Include

Visa arrangements for Bhutan
All accommodation and meals
All permits, taxes and education fund
Tips for local guides is already covered
Local guides and your photographic guide

Extra Cash?

There are no hidden extras and no sneaky “local payments”. You won’t need to pay for much while in Bhutan, just your drinks and laundry are the biggest expenses. Souvenir shopping is modest in Bhutan and most of the time we’re far away from shops anyway :)

We recommend a local sim card for reliable internet access (\$25) and will help you get one before leaving Thimphu.



THE FINE PRINT

Dates

2023: November 19 - December 03

Price

US\$10,288

Group Size

Maximum of 8 people

Inclusions

The instructing photographer and a local guide are included for this tour. Other inclusions include: All meals, the Bhutan Visa fee, all transfers in and around Bhutan, the internal flight from Paro to Bumthang, the mandatory Tourism Development Fee, the Bhutan Government Taxes (35%) and all entry fees to temples & monuments.

Accommodation

A mix of 4 star resort, charming guest houses and tourist grade hotels. Lots of variety. All accommodation is on a twin-share basis unless you select to pay the single supplement of US\$1270.

Difficulty Rating

Our private bus for the trip will have plenty of extra room for camera gear. This is not a trekking tour, but does have some challenges if your lifestyle does not include daily walking. The hike up to Tigers Nest is the hardest section with two to three hours of uphill walking.

Not included

- Flight to and from Bhutan
- Items of personal nature
- Beverages, laundry, phone & internet

The itinerary information may vary slightly for your specific departure, as we continuously research and develop each trip. Inclement weather or other factors outside our control may also necessitate minor alterations.

HOWTO BOOK

2023, November 19 - December 03

15 days

Max group of 8

Twin Share: US\$10,288

Single Room Upgrade + US\$1270

Hit the website to book online. Deposits are required to confirm your place and can be paid via credit card or bank deposit.

ewenbell.com/bhutan



Photography by Ewen Bell

