



Bucket-List

BHUTAN & THAILAND

with Alasdair Clayre



**Exploring the Kingdom of the Thunder
Dragon and the Land of Smiles**

**ETV Endowment of South Carolina
March 14-29, 2024**



Join us as we explore the cultural richness of Bhutan and Thailand.

This spring, join the ETV Endowment on a magical voyage of discovery - from the mystical Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan to the fabled tropical island of Phuket in Thailand. We journey through Bhutan's lush mountain valleys dotted with ancient monasteries and castles, joining in local festivities.

In Thailand, we stay in the heart of bustling Bangkok, then head north to experience tranquil Chiang Mai and visit an elephant sanctuary before finishing our trip island-hopping in the south.

In Bhutan, The Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon, we'll join the locals in celebrating their spectacular annual Talo Tshechu Festival. This colorful event commemorates Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel who unified Bhutan in the 17th Century, defending Bhutan from all foreign invaders. With mesmerizing dances and rituals, every step and gesture weaves together centuries-old stories and traditions.

We'll crest the 10,000-foot Dochu La Pass with its panoramic views and visit monasteries and castles, both in the valleys and clinging to cliffs. There will be local markets and archery tournaments! Experience a completely different world in safety and comfort with the ETV Endowment. In the words of *Conde Nast Traveler Magazine*, "Nestled on the mountainous edge of the Himalayas, this tiny but mighty kingdom is a once-in-a-lifetime splurge worth every penny."

The bustling metropolis of Bangkok will be a dramatic contrast. From the sanctuary of our riverside hotel, we skip the traffic to explore the city by boat. We'll visit the magnificent Grand Palace, the highly revered Wat Phra Kaew and finish at Tha Maharaj, the community craft market. Then we'll fly north to Chiang Mai. Founded in 1296, it was the capital of the independent Lanna Kingdom. Here, we stay in a boutique hotel inside the moat of the old town and take a day trip into the countryside to visit ChangChill Elephant Park and the tribal Cultural Centre of the Karen people.

As a finale, we fly south to Phuket Island and stay in a five-star spa resort on the Andaman Sea. We'll charter our own catamaran for a sunset dinner to Coral Island and a private speed boat out to Phi Phi Island where Leonardo DiCaprio's *The Beach* was filmed.

By the end of our trip, we should fully understand why the Thais are so *sabai sabai* and *sanuk*. Sabai means to be relaxed, comfortable and content. It is a rule of life for Thai people that whatever they do, it has to be sanuk. They must derive pleasure and joy from all aspects of their lives. At our Farewell Dinner, we can reflect on all we have learned and enjoyed on our epic voyage through The Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon and the Land of Smiles.

PUNAKHA DZONG MONASTERY IN
PUNAKHA, BHUTAN



CHIANG MAI, THAILAND



SUNSET ON DOCHU LA PASS, BHUTAN



CHANGCHILL ELEPHANT SANCTUARY, THAILAND



DAY 1 - FRIDAY, MARCH 15

ARRIVE IN BANGKOK

We are met at the airport and transfer to The Cottage Suvarnabhumi Hotel nearby for the night.



PTAMCHOG MONASTERY,
PARO RIVER, BHUTAN

DAY 2 - SATURDAY, MARCH 16

FLY TO PARO & DRIVE TO THIMPHU

Kuzuzangpo! Welcome to Bhutan!

We transfer to the airport for our very early morning plane to Paro, Bhutan. On a clear day, this is one of the most spectacular flights in the world with views of the mighty Himalayas and even Everest. A short drive brings us to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital, with a brief stop at the 15th-century Tamchog Monastery and its famous iron bridge dating from 1433. We check into the Central Druk Hotel, architecturally inspired by the four elements: water, air, earth and fire.

In the afternoon, we visit the National Memorial Chorten built in honor of the third King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. Later, there is an opportunity to stroll in the capital city and perhaps visit the Craft Bazaar featuring Bhutanese handicrafts and artworks.

This evening we enjoy a sumptuous Welcome Dinner in The Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon.

Meals Included: B, L, D

DAY 3 - SUNDAY, MARCH 17

EXPLORING THIMPHU

This morning we visit the tallest seated Buddha statue in the world, the Dordenma Buddha, and enjoy a wonderful view of the Thimphu Valley.

We will visit the weekend farmers market or perhaps catch a spirited archery match in action. Archery is Bhutan's national sport, and opponents are encouraged to distract each other by any means possible, including dancing in front of the targets!

After lunch, we visit the Zilukha nunnery, the largest in Bhutan. This is a great opportunity to learn about the beliefs and practices that inform Bhutanese society, interact with the nuns and take photographs.

This evening is free to wander the medieval streets and try a local restaurant.

Meals Included: B, L



BUDDHA DORDENMA



BHUTANESE MAN PRACTICING ARCHERY

DAY 4 - MONDAY, MARCH 18

THIMPHU TO PUNAKHA VIA THE DOCHU LA PASS

After breakfast, we drive eastward over the 10,000-foot Dochu La Pass where a unique cluster of 108 chortens spiral up the mountain and magnificent views open up toward majestic snow-capped Himalayan peaks. Then we drive down into the sub-tropical Punakha Valley. As we descend to the valley floor, cactus, banana plants and poinsettia plants dominate the landscape. Here we'll take a walk through paddy fields to Chime Lhakhang. This temple is dedicated to Drukpa Kinley, The Divine Madman, easily the most popular and most ribald saint in Bhutanese history. Young married couples visit this temple for the blessing of a healthy and strong child.

In the afternoon, we drive to the Talo Tshechu Festival. Talo Tshechu is very important for all Bhutanese, as the Talo Monastery is the seat of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel who unified Bhutan in the 17th century. Over the three days of festivities, local people wear their finest dress. It's a very colorful celebration and a unique opportunity to experience these vibrant traditions alongside the locals.

Meals Included: B, L, D



DOCHU LA PASS

DAY 5 - TUESDAY, MARCH 19

EXPLORING PUNAKHA

This morning we visit the Khamsum Yuley Namgyal Chorten, built by Her Majesty Queen Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuk. Perched high up on a hill on the bank of a river, the Chorten houses paintings belonging to Nyingmapa traditions.

After lunch, we drive to Punakha Dzong (castle), built in 1637 by the Shabdrung, the "Unifier of Bhutan" as predicted by the great Guru Rinpoche. Situated at the confluence of the Mo Chu and Pho Chu (Mother and Father Rivers) this is the winter headquarters of the Je Khenpo, or Chief Abbot of the country. Hundreds of monks move from Thimphu to this warmer location every year.

The main temple of the Punakha Dzong is a breathtaking example of traditional architecture with four intricately embossed entrance pillars crafted from cypress and decorated in gold and silver. The delicate workmanship in its Prayer Hall is considered comparable to that of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel.

Meals Included: B, L

PUNAKHA DZONG



DAY 6 - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

PUNAKHA TO PARO

After breakfast, we retrace our journey back over to the Paro Valley where we will visit the impressive Dzong (castle) and the 7th-century Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the 108 temples constructed by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. Kyichu is built like the Jokhang in Lhasa and houses a great golden image of Buddha Shakyamuni.

Meals Included: B, L



PRAYER WHEELS AT
KYICHU LHA KHANG



TAKTSANG LHA KHANG

DAY 7 - THURSDAY, MARCH 21

HIKE TO THE TIGER'S NEST (TAKTSANG LHA KHANG)

After breakfast, we set out to make a pilgrimage to one of the most important religious sites in the Himalayas, Taktsang Lhakhang, also known as the Tiger's Nest. This magical monastery clings to a vertical granite cliff 2,000 feet above the valley floor.

The legend of Taktsang dates back to 747 AD when Padmasambhava is believed to have flown here on the back of a tiger to subdue its evil spirits. Tantric Buddhist mythology tells us that the vanquished spirits were transformed into protectors of the dharma. One of them, Singye Samdrup, is recognized today as the guardian deity of Taktsang.

*For those of us not wishing to hike to Taktsang there are many options available,

including a gentle 15-minute walk through traditional houses to the fortified temple complex Dzong Drakha, which is visually as spectacular as Taktsang. We can also drive to Chele La Pass, the highest road pass in Bhutan at 13,083 feet, where we can enjoy a view of Bhutan's Holy Mountain Jomolhari if the weather is clear. We can also join the Talo Tsechu Festival, which will be in full swing.

This afternoon, you may choose to visit some additional sights in Paro or simply relax at the hotel with a luxurious stone bath or massage.

In the evening, we gather for dinner to savor our journey through The Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon.

Meals Included: B, L, D



BANGKOK AT SUNSET

DAY 8 - FRIDAY, MARCH 22

FLY PARO TO BANGKOK

Waving goodbye to the fluttering prayer flags, monasteries and mountains of Bhutan, we fly back to bustling Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. Here we settle into the Salil Hotel Riverside, an oasis of calm, and enjoy a relaxed dinner looking out at the town, an utter contrast to the Bhutan we left behind. A 10-minute stroll brings you to Asiatique The Riverfront. This large open-air mall in the former docks of the East Asiatic Company houses shops, bars and a Ferris Wheel. Alternatively, Icon Siam, a vast and stylish mall with hundreds of high-end shops plus an indoor floating market, is easily reachable by boat.

Meals Included: B, D



GRAND PALACE, BANGKOK, THAILAND

DAY 9 - SATURDAY, MARCH 23

EXPLORE BANGKOK

This morning we set off by boat into the city's fascinating canal network. We'll visit the magnificent Grand Palace to take in the beauty of this sprawling complex boasting some of the finest Thai-Buddhist architecture in the entire country. We'll see the prized Emerald Buddha statue dating back to the 14th century.

Afterward, we head across the road to Wat Pho, the first public university in the Kingdom and the birthplace of traditional Thai massage. Weaving our way through small alleys we'll end our tour at Tha Maharaj, the community craft store, for lunch before returning to our hotel by van.

The rest of the afternoon and evening are free to explore this extraordinary city.

Meals Included: B, L



GREEN TERRACED RICE
FIELD IN CHIANG MAI

DAY 10 - SUNDAY, MARCH 24 FLY FROM BANGKOK TO CHIANG MAI

Today we fly north to the relative tranquility of Chiang Mai. Founded in 1292 as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom, Chiang Mai fell to Myanmar in 1558. In 1774, the Siamese King Taksin drove out the Myanmar, but Chiang Mai retained a degree of independence from Bangkok until the late 19th century. With strong historical ties to Laos and many highland tribes living in the surrounding hills, Chiang Mai has a culture and cuisine quite distinct from Bangkok and the south.

Our hotel, the Tamarind, is an oasis in the middle of the old town. We'll enjoy an orientation of the moated city and later go out for a Khantoke dinner and cultural performance.

Meals Included: B, D



KHANTOKE MEAL

DAY 11 - MONDAY, MARCH 25 ELEPHANTS, HILL TRIBES AND DOI SUTHEP ASCENT

We spend an enlightening morning at ChangChill Elephant Sanctuary. Here, we follow a forest trail to see the Asian elephants and learn from the sanctuary staff about their conservation work. We'll pause for refreshments above the mud pit, where the elephants play and bathe on hot days. Moving on to the riverside, we'll learn about elephant enrichment programs and assist staff as they fill feeding tubes with healthy treats for the animals. Afterward, we'll enjoy lunch on the elephant observation deck before going to visit the Karen Cultural Centre to understand the history and culture of this famous tribal community.



CHANGCHILL ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

This afternoon, relax in Chiang Mai or join us on a drive along the winding road up Doi Suthep, the mountain that towers over the city. Here, where the air is cooler, we can visit the temple by cable car and enjoy commanding views over the surrounding wilderness.

The evening is free to sample local restaurants. The Tamarind's own is excellent!

Meals Included: B, L

DAY 12 - TUESDAY, MARCH 26

FLY FROM CHIANG MAI TO PHUKET, SUNSET CATAMARAN CRUISE & DINNER

After breakfast, we board a mid-morning flight to Phuket and check into our resort on the island. The Pullman Phuket Arcadia Naithon Beach is a stunning and secluded resort for a private escape, with direct access to Naithon Beach, named one of the best beaches on the west coast of Phuket.

Later in the afternoon, we head to Chalong Pier and our private catamaran cruise to Koh Hae or "Coral Island." As its nickname suggests, this island is known for its majestic coral reefs located almost immediately offshore, making Koh Hae an ideal snorkeling site. Discover an abundance of exotic marine life like multicolored parrot fish and coral rock cod. Then we sail to Phromthep Cape and Krating Cape, the two best points of the island to view the sunset, with dinner on board.

Meals Included: B, D

NAITHON BEACH, PHUKET, THAILAND

DAY 13 - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

PRIVATE SPEED BOAT TOUR TO PHI PHI ISLANDS

Boarding from the private departure lounge at the Royal Phuket Marina with our local guide, our first stop is Phi Phi Leh and the stunning Maya Bay, which has reopened after three years. Then we will enter Pileh Lagoon, another of the locations from the Leonardo DiCaprio movie, *The Beach*. Here we can take a swim in the crystal-clear waters. We pass by Viking Cave to Phi Phi Don Island and stop at Monkey Beach to see its macaques.

In Tonsai Bay, we can hike up to the spectacular Phi Phi viewpoint or stay on the beach. We will stop for snorkeling and visit beautiful Bamboo Island to enjoy a picnic lunch before returning to the Royal Phuket Marina and our hotel.

The remainder of the afternoon and evening are free to relax at the resort or explore Phuket.

Meals Included: B, L



PILEH LAGOON

DAY 14 - THURSDAY, MARCH 28

FREE DAY, FAREWELL DINNER & DEPARTURE

Spend your day at leisure on the beach, in the spa or venture into Phuket for shopping. This evening, we gather for our Farewell Dinner and a chance to reflect together on what an extraordinary adventure we have enjoyed, from the Himalayas to the Andaman Sea, from Mystical Bhutan, The Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon, to Thailand, The Land of Smiles.

After dinner, we transfer to the nearby airport for our flights home, full of *sabia* and *sanuk*, relaxed, comfortable and joyfully content.

Meals Included: B, D

DAY 15 - FRIDAY, MARCH 29

ARRIVAL IN THE US

ACCOMMODATIONS

THE COTTAGE SUVARNABHUMI - FRIDAY, MARCH 15

<https://www.thecottagebangkokairport.com>

This hotel incorporates the green scenery of the suburban region through a blend of tropical and modern designs.

CENTRAL DRUK HOTEL

SATURDAY, MARCH 16 & SUNDAY, MARCH 17

<https://drukhoteles.com/thimphu>

This luxury four-star hotel has been renovated to give it a chic and modern edge that is powerfully felt in uncluttered spaces. Each floor, differently inspired, explores a subtle palette drawn from water, air, earth, fire and sky.

DHENSA RESORT

MONDAY, MARCH 18 & TUESDAY, MARCH 19

<http://dhensa.com>

Dhensa sits in the heart of the tranquil and lush Punakha Valley. Flanked by thick pine forests, it overlooks the Punakha River and hundreds of paddy fields that staircase down to the valley floor.

NAKSEL BOUTIQUE HOTEL

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20 & THURSDAY, MARCH 21

<https://www.naksel.com>

Nestled on the edge of the national forest and the quiet Ngoba Village, Naksel rests on six acres of apple orchard, nearly 8,800 feet above sea level. Each room boasts unparalleled views of Mount Jumolhari and Taktsang Monastery.

SALIL HOTEL RIVERSIDE

FRIDAY, MARCH 22 & SATURDAY, MARCH 23

<https://thesalilriverside.com>

Located alongside the scenic Chao Phraya River, The Salil Hotel Riverside puts us right at the heart of the city while its riverside space and quiet garden offer a refuge from the hustle and bustle. Conveniently, the Salil has its own pier, so we can bypass the notorious street traffic.

TAMARIND VILLAGE CHIANG MAI

SUNDAY, MARCH 24 & MONDAY, MARCH 25

<http://www.tamarindvillage.com/>

Experience the charm of a secluded Thai resort in the city center at Tamarind Village, a peaceful, romantic boutique hotel celebrating local Lanna heritage. It's among the Old City's most romantic hotels, and its Thai restaurant is a top destination in itself.

PULLMAN PHUKET ARCADIA KARON BEACH RESORT

TUESDAY, MARCH 26 & WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

<https://www.pullmanphuketkaron.com/>

Perched on the headland overlooking the crystal waters of the Andaman Sea, the Pullman Phuket Arcadia Naithon Beach is the most stunning Phuket resort for a private escape. Guests have direct access to Naithon Beach, named one of the best beaches on the west coast of Phuket.



CENTRAL DRUK HOTEL



DHENSA RESORT



NAKSEL BOUTIQUE HOTEL



SALIL HOTEL RIVERSIDE



TAMARIND VILLAGE CHIANG MAI



PULLMAN PHUKET ARCADIA KARON BEACH RESORT



YOUNG MONKS

PRICING & TRIP DETAILS

TOUR PRICE PER PERSON:

Double Occupancy: \$11,679, includes a \$1,000 tax-deductible contribution
Single Supplement: \$1,500

A non-refundable deposit of \$1,000 per person is required to secure your place on this trip.

Price Includes:

- \$1,000 tax-deductible donation to the ETV Endowment
- Expert guidance of Alasdair Clayre
- Deluxe motorcoach transportation
- Round-trip flights between Bangkok and Paro
- Flights from Bangkok to Chiang Mai and from Chiang Mai to Phuket
- Visa fees, SDF (Sustainable Development Fee), gratuities and all government taxes
- 13 nights hotel accommodations
- Breakfast daily, 9 lunches and 7 dinners
- Entry fees and monument fees to all museums, temples and related sites
- Local English-speaking tour director
- Roundtrip airport transfers
- Baggage handling for one piece of luggage

Please remember that Bhutan is a bucket-list destination which restricts annual visitor numbers with a high per diem Sustainable Development Fee and limited flights. The ETV Endowment has organized this exclusive trip to coincide with the colorful spring festival season, the hardest but most rewarding time of year to visit this extraordinary country. Alasdair Clayre has designed the itinerary with experts who advise the Kingdom's Tourism Ministry. Book early to avoid disappointment!

Not Included:

- Airfare to/from the US
- Services, meals and drinks not mentioned in the itinerary
- Laundry, telephone calls and expenditures of a personal nature
- Travel insurance

PLEASE NOTE: Itinerary is subject to change. You should plan to arrive at Bangkok International Airport (BKK) and depart from Phuket International Airport (HKT). **Do not book airfare until instructed to do so by the ETV Endowment.**