

## WISDOM ADVENTURES: EXPLORING THE DHARMA IN BHUTAN

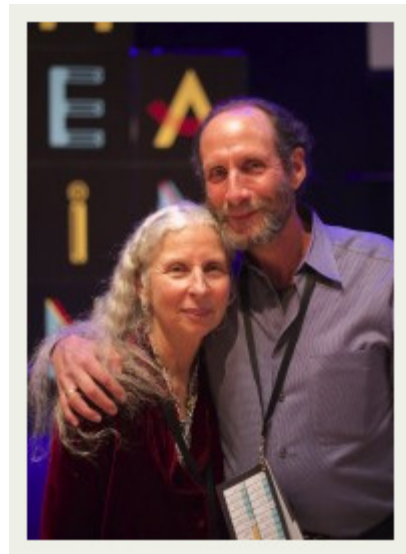
September 9 – 21, 2018



Dzongs—Guided Meditations—Nuns  
Bumthang—Monasteries—Stupas  
Gross National Happiness—Buddhism & Dharma

### Welcome to Ponte Travels!

Join us for a very special meditative adventure to Bhutan, the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon, led by Joel and Michelle Levey for a small group of travelers. The founders of Wisdom at Work—Joel and Michelle are pioneers in the contemplative sciences and mindfulness movement, and long-time students, practitioners, and teachers in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Together we will experience Bhutan in a profoundly meaningful and "enlightening" way through Buddhist practice as we meditate in awe inspiring monasteries, uncover the ancient stories and wisdom teachings in sacred art, and take a special journey to the verdant valleys of Bumthang—birthplace of Buddhism in Bhutan.



**Joel and Michelle Levey** have spent the last 45 years bringing the fruits of inner spiritual practices, backed by scientific inquiry, to organizations and communities across the world. They have published numerous books on their work, most recently *Mindfulness, Meditation and Mind Fitness*, Conari Press (April 2015).

In particular, Michelle and Joel have studied closely with many remarkable teachers in the foundational mindfulness traditions, including The Dalai Lama, Kalu Rinpoche, 16th Karmapa, Zong Rinpoche along with many others.

Nobel Laureate, the Dalai Lama, an advisor on a number of the Leveys' projects once wrote in a letter to the Leveys: "You are presently engaged in work that has great prospects for bringing the Dharma (the inner sciences of human transformation) to a very wide section of people who may not under ordinary circumstances come into contact with these teaching. I am very pleased about the work that you are doing and send you blessings and prayers for your success."

Joel and Michelle will call upon their work as "mindfulness pioneers", the deep knowledge they have of the traditions that underlie Buddhism in Tibet and their dedication to sharing this knowledge with others to lead a profoundly meaningful journey to Bhutan.

More information about the Leveys is available at <http://www.wisdomatwork.com>. There is a slide show from last year's Wisdom Adventure in Bhutan here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLA7NtEiwIE&t=813s>

### Pre-requisites and Fitness Capability

The only prerequisite for participation is to be open and interested. No prior meditation experience required.

While there are not many hikes and no treks on this trip and no elevators in our hotels, we recommend that you be active, in good health and are strong walkers and/or hikers. Those who are moderately fit will be comfortable with most of these activities. Where available, transportation options are noted for those who may require alternatives to the hikes.

**How is Ponte Travels different from other travel agencies and tour operators?**

Unlike travel agencies, we specialize in off-the-beaten path, custom-designed itineraries for individuals and small groups. Our focus is on sustainable tourism, with low environmental impact and high cultural interaction.

**24-hour local support & assistance**

We partner with expert agents and guides in the countries we visit who are specially trained to deal with unexpected issues and can assist you 24/7 in the event of an emergency.

**Safe and reliable cars & drivers:**

Your safety is our primary concern, which is why we only work with partners who share our high safety and quality standards for the drivers and vehicles used.

**Hotels:**

All our hotels, homestays, guesthouses, eco-lodges, tented camps and houseboats (based on location and itinerary) have been selected to offer a high level of unique experience, service, cleanliness and value.

**Local guides:**

We use English-speaking, certified, local guides who are passionate about sharing their country with you.

**Giving back:**

We believe that responsible tourism involves giving back to organizations that are working to improve the lives of the poorest citizens in the countries we visit. We make a donation from every tour to carefully selected NGOs who we believe are making a difference. Learn more about who we support at [www.pontetravels.com](http://www.pontetravels.com).

**YOUR PERSONAL TRAVEL CONSULTANTS**

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As the Co-founders and Managing Director of Ponte Travels, it's our personal mission to partner with you to ensure that your entire travel experience is rewarding, enriching and as carefree as possible.



## ITINERARY

### SEPTEMBER 9 – ARRIVE BANGKOK



Arrive Bangkok according to your flight details. After clearing customs, take the 5-minute walk to the airport hotel, or catch the hotel shuttle bus.

Overnight: Novotel Airport Hotel or similar

Meals: none

### SEPTEMBER 10: PARO—THIMPU



Early morning departure from Bangkok. As the hotel is walking distance from the airport, you will make your way there on your own, checking in at least two hours in advance of your flight.

Upon arrival in Paro, transfer to Thimpu, the capital city of Bhutan, approximately an hour by road.

Throughout Bhutan we will encounter three types of religious structures: *dzongs* (monasteries that are also fortresses, which may also function as government seats), *lhakhangs* (monasteries or temples) and *chortens* (stupas or Buddhist shrines).

Afternoon visit to the National Memorial Chorten. Built for the 3<sup>rd</sup> King of Bhutan, this white and gold stupa is dedicated to World Peace. In the evenings, many locals walk around the stupa, offering prayers and garnering good karma.

Each day, time permitting, the group will gather for a reflection and meditation session.

Overnight: Hotel Norbuling, Deluxe Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2,250 m / 7,382 ft

## SEPTEMBER 11: THIMPU—TANGO LHAKHANG



Today, hike to Tango Lhakhang, considered to be a very auspicious site—the unifier of Bhutan was said to have meditated in the nearby caves. Participate in a prayer ceremony with a lama from the monastery who will share his insights on Bhutanese Buddhism, its practices and philosophy with us. Afterwards, meditate at either Tango or Cheri Monastery.

Enjoy a local, organic picnic lunch on our way back to Thimpu.

Afternoon at leisure. Visit a local café, browse for spectacularly colorful Bhutanese postage stamps or outfit yourself as the locals do with a beautiful handwoven *gho* (for men) or *kira* (for women).

Optional visit with Tachi Zangmo, founder of the non-profit organization The Bhutan Nuns Foundation. The meeting will take place at a lovely temple in Thimpu!

This evening, dine with a representative from the Center for Bhutanese Study who will talk to the group about Gross National Happiness.

Overnight: Hotel Norbuling, Deluxe Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2,250 m / 7,382 ft

## **SEPTEMBER 12: THIMPU—BUDDHIST HIGHLIGHTS**



Today we explore Buddha Point – site of one of the largest statues of the Buddha in the world. Afterwards, we'll meditate at Zilukha Nunnery—the largest nunnery in Bhutan. We'll light 108 butter lamps to bring all beings good karma, health and happiness.

After lunch in a local restaurant we'll visit several important places illustrating Bhutanese culture and Buddhism. Taschichho Dzong, set along the Wangchhu river, is the current seat of the Bhutanese government. See the oldest cypress tree in Bhutan, beside the Pangrizampa Astrology school, where Shabdrung Rinpoche, the founder of the Bhutanese state, was called to come by a vision. Tara Lhaden Zhingkhram Lhakhang Temple, dedicated in 2014 by the King and Queen of Bhutan, houses 21 clay sculptures of Tara, crafted by master Bhutanese artists.

Overnight: Hotel Norbuling, Deluxe Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2,250 m / 7,382 ft



## **SEPTEMBER 13: THIMPU—GANGTEY**



Depart for Gangtey, considered one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan and home to the endangered black-necked cranes. Along the way, stop at Dochula pass, a beautiful site that features 108 stupas. Walk around the stupas, hoist prayer flags and perform a smoke offering to the Mountain gods. Weather permitting, take in the spectacular views of the peaks from the pass and pause for a brief session or dharma talk.

Arrive in Gangtey and rest before dinner.

Overnight: Hotel Dewachen, Deluxe Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2540 m/ 8350 ft

Drive time: approx. 8 hours

## **SEPTEMBER 14: GANGTEY - BUMTHANG**



Early morning transfer from Gangtey to Bumthang, passing through many villages on the way. Climb majestic Pele La pass and enjoy sweeping views of the valleys of Bumthang below.

Bumthang, in central Bhutan, is the land of lush, green valleys and is the spiritual center of the kingdom. Guru Rinpoche cured a spiritually ailing local king in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Bumthang, which eventually led to the entire kingdom adopting Buddhism. There are many sacred relics and sites here from the times of Guru Rinpoche and other important teachers that followed, such as Pema Lingpa. The area is also famous for its apples and fresh apple juice. Nyingma Buddhism, the most ancient form of Tibetan Buddhism, is practiced here.

Upon arrival in Jakar, we'll explore Jampay Lhakhang and Tamshing Lhakhang, which are a 30-minute walk apart from each other and nearby our hotel.

**Tamshing Lhakhang** holds one of many chainmail coats made by Pema Lingpa. Carry the 55-pound coat around the kora three times to gain merit! This unusually shaped structure is said to have been built by and adorned with paintings made by Pema Lingpa himself. The inner sanctuary contains a statue of Guru Rinpoche said to be sculpted by *khandromas* or spirits and is considered the most important Nyigma Goempa in the entire kingdom.

**Jampay Lhakhang**, built in 659, has a truly ancient feel to it and it contains the oldest temple in Bhutan. Visited by Guru Rinpoche, the inner sanctum houses a Jampa - Buddha of the future.

Overnight: Mountain Lodge, Deluxe Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2800 m /9200 ft

Drive time: approx. 10 hours



## SEPTEMBER 15: BUMTHANG – HIKE TO NGANG LHAKHANG



This morning, enjoy an easy, three-hour hike up the Bumthang river from Thangbi Gompa to the charming region known as Ngang Yul ('Swan Land'). Begin the hike by passing through a traditional stupa-like gateway, stopping to admire a rock painting and a traditional water mill as you walk.

Upon arrival at Ngang Lhakhang, marvel at this temple, built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Lama Namkha Samdrup, contemporary of Pema Lingpa and known as the 'treasure hunter'. The interior contains beautiful statues and paintings, including a statue of Guru Rinpoche made by Pema Lingpa himself. The upper chapel is a *goenkhang*, with statues of the trinity and protector dieties lurking in the shadows.

Afternoon, explore **Kurjey Lhakhang**, named for the body print from Guru Rinpoche that one of the temples contains. We'll immerse ourselves in the rich legacy of Guru Rinpoche, with time for meditation and contemplation. A five-minute walk from the temples, you'll find the sacred spring Kurjey Drupcchu, where monks go to do wash!

Overnight: Mountain Lodge, Deluxe Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2800 m / 9200 ft

Hike – no real elevation gain

## SEPTEMBER 16: BUMTHANG – THARPALING MONASTERY



Today we'll explore Tharpaling Monastery, located on the hillside above Bumthang. The monastery was built by the great saint Kuenkhen Longchen Runjam, whose teachings have inspired Joel and Michelle for the past 40 years.

After exploring the monastery, we'll seek out, on foot, the many sacred sites and relics to be found near the monastery.

**\*\*Schedule permitting** - we will try to organize a visit with Chung Rinpoche who is the head lama at the Tharpaling Monastery. This all depends on his schedule, which at this time is not known.

Overnight: Mountain Lodge, Deluxe Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2800 m /9200 ft

Drive: 2 hours one way

## SEPTEMBER 17: BUMTHANG - PARO



This morning, we'll make our way back to Paro by air.

Upon arrival in Paro, visit Ta Dzong, the Bhutanese National Museum, which holds a fascinating collection of Bhutanese art, including bronze statuary and paintings. We will then walk down the trail to visit Rinpung Dzong, also known as "Fortress of the Heap of Jewels", noted for its stunning architecture.

Overnight: Gangtey Palace, Standard Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2,250 m / 7,382 ft

## SEPTEMBER 18: PARO— TIGER'S NEST



This morning, depart for a \*half day hike up to the iconic Tiger's Nest monastery, another 1500 m high in altitude. Enjoy the spectacular views from the trail up to the monastery. Lunch after the hike in Paro.

Rest of the afternoon free in Paro to shop the markets, sip tea at a local café or just relax.



Overnight: Gangtey Palace, Standard Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2,250 m / 7,382 ft

\*Options include hiking the full way up and down, riding a pony up to the cafeteria and hiking the rest of the way up and then back down or riding the pony to the cafeteria, enjoying a cup of tea and hiking down.

## SEPTEMBER 19: PARO— KICCHU LHAKANG



This morning, visit to Kicchu Lhakang, where Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche lived. On our visit, see the famous Jowo Shakyamuni statue, complete with prostration footprints in the floorboard. Ask to see Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's bedroom adjoining the main shrine room and visit his former home, now a small museum.

Afternoon free to walk around Paro, do some shopping or sip tea in a café!

Learn about the Bhutanese national sport of archery this evening at the hotel, followed by a farewell dinner and wrap up session.

Overnight: Gangtey Palace, Standard Room

Meals: B, L, D

Altitude: 2,250 m / 7,382 ft

## **SEPTEMBER 20: PARO—HOME**



Say goodbye to the friendly people of Bhutan. Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

Or extend your stay with our Thailand excursion! Ask for details.

Meals: B

### **TOTAL COST OF (12 DAYS, 11 NIGHTS)**

(per person, double occupancy): \$4390 USD

Single supplement: \$460 USD

Airfare economy class, Bangkok – Paro - Bangkok (non-refundable fare, price subject to change until booked): \$780

Airfare economy class, Bumthang - Paro (non-refundable fare, price subject to change until booked): \$190

#### **Price Includes:**

- All accommodation at the hotels listed or similar
- Meals as indicated in itinerary (Breakfast (B), Lunch (L), Dinner (D))
- Private transportation
- All tours as indicated in itinerary
- Entrance fees
- All excursions with the services of a registered and experienced, English-speaking guide
- Bhutan visa and permits

#### **Not Included:**

- International airfare
- Airport departure taxes
- Any meals unless mentioned in the itinerary
- Any items of a personal nature, including portage, laundry, telephone calls, table drinks.
- Passport fees
- Gratuities to drivers, guides, wait-staff, maid service, porters

The cost, hotels and specifics of this itinerary are based on current conditions and are subject to change for any reason at the discretion of Ponte Travels.

### BENEFICIARIES

We believe that to travel responsibly, a portion of our tour cost should benefit the communities we visit. For this trip, our donation will go to a non-profit organization we support that is having a very positive impact in Bhutan: BHUTAN NUNS FOUNDATION— a non-profit working to empower and educate Bhutanese women.

### ABOUT PONTE TRAVELS

We're cultural adventurers and wildlife enthusiasts who have a passion for the outdoors, art, architecture, history and a good meal! We offer life enhancing trips to many of the world's most fascinating places - custom made just for you, your family, non-profit or special interest group.

Our mission is to explore, connect, give back and most importantly, enjoy the journey. Whether by hiking, sailing, hot air ballooning, jeep or walking safari, plane, train or automobile, choosing PONTE TRAVELS is a choice for responsible tourism. Your travel dollars benefit local communities, safeguard wildlife and help support NGOs who are working to improve the lives of millions.

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### BOOKING AND OTHER INFORMATION

**Reservations and Payments:** Reservations are initiated on receipt by Ponte Travels of a signed reservation form and a 25% deposit per passenger. The balance of payment is due 90 days prior to departure. If a reservation is made within 90 days of the trip departure, the entire cost of the trip must be paid at the time of confirmation to Ponte Travels. All reservations are automatically canceled if all payments are not received by the due date, with full loss of trip deposit. All payments must be made in US dollars.

**Reservation Amendments:** All reservation amendments will be subject to changes in cost of the original itinerary and will be subject to the same cancellation penalties described below.

**Cancellation and Penalties:** All cancellations must be made in writing, signed by the client, and sent to Ponte Travels. All trips are subject to the following, per person cancellation charges based on the number of days before trip departure that we receive your written cancellation request.

- More than 90 days: Forfeit Deposit.
- Less than 90 days: No refund of trip cost.
- No refunds for unused tours or services during your trip.

### VISAS

A visa is required of U.S. citizens to visit Bhutan and **must** be acquired for you by your travel consultant. Your passport must be valid six months from date of arrival with one blank page required for Bhutan.

### FINANCIAL PROTECTION

All deposits and tour payments made to Ponte Travels are placed in a trust account until payment is made to suppliers.

### TRAVEL INSURANCE

We require that all travelers purchase basic emergency assistance, medical assistance and evacuation insurance when traveling with our groups. We also highly recommend buying additional travel insurance that covers trip cancellation and interruption, lost or stolen baggage, terrorism, natural disasters and more. Travel insurance is available for purchase through Ponte Travels via Traveler. You are also welcome to purchase your own travel insurance.

TO MAKE YOUR RESERVATION, REQUEST A LINK TO OUR BOOKING FORM BY CONTACTING:



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