

**ALVARO'S ADVENTURES**  
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# **BHUTAN**

**Birding the Land of the Thunder.  
Thailand Pre-tour.**

**March 18 to April 5, 2021**  
Reschedule from May 2020

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The unique Ibisbill, common in Bhutan.

**Alvaro's Adventures** is returning for our third tour of Bhutan. It is a fantastic trip, to watch birds and visit the Himalayas and the distinctive Buddhist culture of Bhutan. Alvaro will team up with expert local birding guides to offer an authoritative, yet distinctly fun and informative tour of the birds and natural areas of Bhutan. This promises to be a highlight for any birder interested in seeing one of the most distinctive of countries and cultures.

High in the mysterious and majestic eastern Himalaya, nestled between Tibet and India, is the small Kingdom of Bhutan, increasingly renowned as one of the earth's last precious unspoiled spots. In this magical place, an intact Buddhist culture is integrated into every aspect of daily life, and spectacular mountain scenery provides a backdrop to pristine forests and picturesque valleys. The breathtaking landscape is dotted with fluttering prayer flags, colorful farmhouses amidst terraced fields, and impressive monasteries clinging to impossible cliffs.

Until recently, Bhutan's remoteness, steep terrain, and tightly controlled tourism have ensured that its incredible beauty and fascinating people remained a quiet secret known to only a few. Bhutan was closed to outsiders until 1960; its first roads were built in 1969. Bhutan is the only remaining intact Himalayan Buddhist kingdom.

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Over 70 percent of the country is forested, and unlike other Himalayan countries, most of Bhutan's original forest remains intact. The Buddhist philosophy of respect for all living things, and a progressive government approach to development in which the preservation of the environment and the promotion of Bhutan's unique culture and traditions are key elements, have maintained a healthy environment where wildlife flourishes. As a result, Bhutan lies in an area designated as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. The amount of forest is astounding!

This shining cultural gem is also a birder's paradise. Its wide altitudinal range—from sub-tropical lowlands to alpine peaks—provides an array of climatic conditions and habitats, from lowland “jungles” to temperate forests and alpine tundra that support over 650 bird species. The diversity of bird life in Bhutan is further augmented by numerous migrating species that pass-through Bhutan on their travels north and south. For these reasons, the Bhutan bird list includes some of the rarest and most sought-after species in the eastern Himalayas.

Thirty-four species of birds classed as threatened or nearly threatened are found in Bhutan, including the Rufous-necked Hornbill, Pallas's Fish Eagle, and the critically endangered White-bellied Heron. Because of Bhutan's progressive forest conservation practices many of these species still thrive in Bhutan and can be found easier here than elsewhere in their range.

Throughout the tour we'll see and occasionally stop to visit the impressive monasteries, dzongs (the monastery/fortresses that serve as Bhutan's administrative and religious centers), lhakhangs (temples), and chortens (stupas) that are important features of Bhutan's religion and culture, both past and present. We will have opportunities to see traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts, which represent an exciting and vital aspect of Bhutan's living heritage and which reflect Bhutan's spiritual and intellectual life.

Note that this is a longer tour than the ones we have done in the past, in order to visit the new road in the south that allows access to some wonderful forest as well as the Bhutanese Lowlands. This will add many interesting species, and new habitats to the tour. Although many tours camp, ours is based in hotels, no camping nights will happen on this tour. Camping can be great, but we have found that the comfort level and proximity of nice hotels or lodges works well for our tour, and hotel visits actually add a more culturally well-rounded experience than camping does.



This is the local subspecies of the White Wagtail, *alboides*, quite a stunner.

## Itinerary

**Note:** We are planning on a one or two-day birding visit in Thailand before our tour. Details and price TBA.

**Day 0. March 18, 2021:** Arrival in Bangkok, overnight in Bangkok.

**Day 1. March 19, 2021: Arrival in Bhutan, Paro area.** Bangkok- Bhutan flight in the morning, at this time we expect a flight departure at 6:30 am. Arrive in Bhutan and bird around the Paro Valley (7400 feet). Birds to look out for are Ibisbill, Black-tailed Crake, along with other more common species. Overnight in Thimphu.

**Day 2. March 20, 2021: Thimphu area.** This morning we will drive to the northern end of the valley in the morning. Expected birds are Fire-tailed Myzornis, Satyr

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Tragopan, spotted nutcracker, sunbirds, etc. Afternoon sightseeing around Thimphu City. Overnight Thimphu.

**Day 3. March 21, 2021: Thimphu- Phobjikha.** Early morning check-out. First stop will be at the Dochola pass at 10,100 feet where the main target will be the Fire-tailed Myzornis. Depending on the fitness level of the group, we would go on a birding hike. The trail is all downhill and it would be only about 1.5 miles through rhododendron and magnolia forests. Likely birds are Green tailed & Mrs. Gould's sunbirds, Bar-throated Siva, Collared Owlet, Maroon Oriole, Black-faced & Chestnut-crowned laughingthrushes, Brown Parrotbill, etc. We will then continue descending to the bottom of the valley, turn east and then ascends just before the Pele la pass from where we will leave the national highway and divert to the valley of Phobjikha. Phobjikha is the biggest wetland in Bhutan and the winter home to about 500 black-necked cranes that arrive from the Tibetan plateau by late October and migrate back by March. If we are lucky we may still find a few of them still lingering around in the valley. Night in Phobjikha.

**Day 4. March 22, 2021: Phobjikha -Chummey.** We will be driving over the Pele la pass at 11,400 feet where we will be birding early in the morning. Monal and Blood pheasants as well as the Satyr Tragopan are distinct possibilities. Other specialties are Spotted Laughingthrush, Great Parrotbill, Collared Grosbeak, White-winged Grosbeak, White-browed Rosefinch, Crimson-browed Finch, Red-headed Bullfinch, etc. At Trongsa we may visit the Dzong and the watchtower museum before we proceed to Chummey where we will be halting for the night. Night in Chummey.

**Day 5. March 23, 2021: Chummey-Yongkhola.** Today marks the day when we will expect our checklist to really takeoff. Starting at the Phrumisngla pass at 12,700 feet, past the Yongkhola region at 6000 feet and all the way to the bottom of the valley at Lingmethang at less than a 1000 feet, all in a matter of a couple of hours is considered to be one of the best birding drives in all of Asia. During this beautiful drive through pristine high-altitude montane forests and through lovely blossoms of several rhododendron species, we can expect to see of the specular birds of the Himalayas such as the Blood Pheasant, Satyr Tragopan, Monal Pheasant, Ward's Trogon, Rufous-necked Hornbills, several species of laughingthrushes, flycatchers, nuthatches, warblers, tits, etc. During our three nights at this beautiful place we can expect to see as much as 200 species. We will also arrange night drives to look out for flying squirrels and other mammals. Overnight Yongkhola.

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- Day 6. March 24, 2021: Yongkhola.** The first of two days of birding here. The area is very scenic and there will also be time for people just to chill out and see what the local people do. Overnight Yongkhola.
- Day 7. March 25, 2021: Yongkhola.** The second of two full days of birding here. We will spend the day trying to find the local specialties we have not yet seen, hopefully we can find the Beautiful Nuthatch! Overnight Yongkhola.
- Days 8. March 26, 2021: Yongkhola-Panbang** For the next couple of days we will be doing mainly lowland birding. The drive to Panbang is quite long, keep this in mind. We will be passing through the town of Nganlam on our way and will be birding during the trip. During today's drive one of the birds that we will be paying special attention to will be the Blyth's Kingfisher. Other new species for the trip would include the Great Indian Hornbill, Long-tailed Broadbill, and Silver-breasted Broadbill, etc. Overnight Panbang.
- Days 9. March 27, 2021: Panbang.** Panbang is located just 13 km from the Royal Manas National Park and in the morning we can take a raft down the Manas River to visit the Park Headquarters. For those who are interested in Photography, today is the perfect day to photograph the hornbills as we will hopefully be seeing many of them. There will also be several species of Parakeets, Red-Headed Trogon is also fairly common here. Besides birds, for the next couple of days we should be encountering several troops of the very rare primate, the Golden Langur. Overnight Panbang.
- Day 10. March 28, 2021: Panbang-Tingtibe.** The drive through lush green sub-tropical forests teeming with wildlife as we head to Tingtibe is very beautiful. We may be able to spot Golden Langurs very close to the road and so keep your cameras always handy. We will be stopping at Tingtibe for two nights. After Yongkhola, Tingtibe is probably the second most popular birding site in Bhutan. Overnight Tingtibe.
- Day 11. March 29, 2021: Tingtibe.** Full day birding in and around Tingtibe. The likely birds are White-hooded Babbler, White-bellied Parrotbill, Black-throated Parrotbill, an assortment of warblers, Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, and several species of drongos. We will also look out for Asia's rarest bird – the white-bellied heron. Overnight in Tingtibe.
- Day 12. March 30, 2021: Tingtibe-Gelephu.** Today's drive will literally take us to the lowest point in Bhutan. Gelephu borders the Indian state of Assam. This region

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is the flattest region of Bhutan and as a result has the potential to become the economic hub of Bhutan in the future. Here we will see several subtropical species such as Pied Hornbills, Indian Peafowl, Indian Roller, Asian barred Owlet, Spotted Owlet, Parakeets, Coucals, etc. Overnight in Gelephu.

- Day 13. March 31, 2021: Gelephu - Tsirang.** The drive will take us to Sarpang, located about 18 miles from Gelephu. From there the road climbs all the way to the district of Tsirang. This drive is also very rich in birds. Indian Peafowls, Crested Serpent Eagle, hornbills, barbets, parakeets, nuthatches, drongos, magpies, woodpeckers, and many others will be looked for. Night in Tsirang.
- Day 14. April 1, 2021: Tsirang-Punakha.** We again descend to the bottom of the valley and then turn north following the Punatsangchu River at which point we will ascend and return to the highlands. Today's drive offers us the best chance of see the extremely rare White-bellied Heron. Because the global population of this bird is estimated to less than 60 individuals, the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature is constructing a center where they plan to have a captive breeding program. The drive will also take us through the Punatsangchu Hydro Electric Project, which has recently come under lots of criticism and has really impacted the image of Bhutan as an Environmental leader. Overnight Punakha.
- Day 15. April 2, 2021: Punakha.** The white-bellied heron is also frequently sighted at Punakha, if we have not already found this rare species. Punakha is the winter headquarters of the central monastic body and we will also visit the majestic Dzong. Almost all of Bhutan's most important events in its recent history has taken place in this Dzong (fortress/monastery). It is a wonderful building, in a beautiful setting. Overnight in Punakha.
- Day 16. April 3, 2021: Punakha-Paro.** A short drive from our hotel we will rejoin the road towards Thimphu, which you drove through on Day 3. We will drive past Thimphu and to Paro for your last two nights. Upon arrival in Paro, for those keen we will hike to the iconic Tiger's nest monastery. It is a two-hour uphill hike and another 90 minutes or so on the return, one can also hike part of the way up, or avoid the hike altogether. The Tiger's Nest is a fantastic site, one of the iconic visits of Bhutan but it is a tough hike! Note that the hike is optional. Overnight Paro.
- Day 17. April 4, 2021: Paro.** Early morning drive to the Chelila pass (12,700 feet). Birds we will be searching for include the Kalij, Blood and Monal pheasants, Collared and White-winged grosbeaks, Spotted and Black-faced laughing thrushes, Snow Pigeon, White-winged Rosefinch, to name a few and any highland species we

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have not seen yet. We will spend a leisurely afternoon around Paro town.  
Overnight Paro.

**Day 18. April 5, 2021:** Depart Bhutan. Transfer to airport and fly to Bangkok.



**Green-backed Tit, a close relative of the Great Tit.**

## About the Physical Requirements & Pace

Our plan is to see a wide cross section of the birds of Bhutan, with efforts to find some of the regional specialties, while also taking in the grandeur of the physical beauty of this country as well as the cultural heritage of the kingdom. This is a land of immeasurable beauty, a place where people live in harmony and are said to be truly happy. We want to be happy too! We realize that some of the birding will be in higher elevations, and we shall take it easy during these days. In higher areas, we do come down to lower elevations to sleep, but there will be some nights when we will be sleeping above 9000 feet. Most nights we will be sleeping much lower than this. Note that we will be starting the days early to be able to take in the best hours of morning birding and may have great leisurely picnic lunches prepared by our field team, although typically we will not be in a situation where we can head back to the hotel for an



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afternoon siesta, although in Yonkhola we will likely have a post-lunch break. Roads in the western part of Bhutan are quite good, but in the East, there has been ample road construction. It is possible that when we are there, this construction may have been finished. Still, these are mountain roads, so be aware that windy roads are something we will encounter on a daily basis. If you are prone to motion sickness keep this in mind, and bring medication. Note that while many tours to Bhutan include camping, this one does not, we will be staying in multiple comfortable local hotels. Being out in the field, away from the noise of the city, eating a great lunch while the birds sing, and we chat and enjoy great company – these will in fact be highlights of this fascinating and unique tour. Much of our birding will be from roads, and usually we will try to bird while walking downhill.

Although there is no hiking, if you do the hike to the Tiger's Nest it is a hike of a couple of hours non-stop to reach the temple, and an hour and a half to return. It is a somewhat strenuous hike; it is long and may not be for everyone. This hike is optional. We may also take at least one downhill hike through a forest trail, a hike of 1.5 miles or so. It is a walk that can be skipped if you are not up to it. Otherwise the birding is quite relaxed and from level surfaces, mainly from roads with little to no traffic.

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**Birding in Bhutan.**



**Himalayan Monal - a real "wow" bird.**

## Your Guides

**Alvaro Jaramillo** was born in Chile but began birding in Toronto, where he lived as a youth. He was trained in ecology and evolution with a particular interest in bird behavior. Research forays and backpacking trips introduced Alvaro to the riches of the Neotropics, where he has traveled extensively. He is the author of the *Birds of Chile*, an authoritative yet portable field guide to Chile's birds. In 2016 he published the *ABA Field Guide to the birds of California*. Alvaro writes the Identify Yourself column in *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Alvaro recently wrote a large part of the sparrow chapter for the *Handbook of Birds of the World* and is writing a photo guide to the birds and wildlife of Patagonia. He was recently granted the Eisenmann



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Medal by the Linnaean Society of New York, it is awarded occasionally for excellence in ornithology and encouragement of the amateur. Alvaro lives with his family in Half Moon Bay, California.



**Local Guides – The trip will be co-led by a most experienced birding guide and perhaps a secondary guide, as well as our driver who is also well versed in birds and nature.**

**Sonam Dorjee** is an avid birder and one of the lead birdwatching guides for Bhutan Birding and Heritage Travels. Sonam started his career as a member of the Bhutan Birding and Heritage Travels support staff team in 2006. However, his passion for birding meant that he was serving as the assistant to the company's lead birder

– Hishey Tshering – by early 2007. By mid-2008, Sonam had quickly progressed through the ranks and was leading birdwatching tours all by himself. Since then, he has established himself as one of the premier birding guides in not only the company but in the whole of Bhutan itself. Sonam has led several birdwatching tours over the years, and he has birded extensively throughout Bhutan. Besides leading birdwatching tours, Sonam has also been on numerous cultural and trekking tours. Sonam's passions – other than birdwatching – include photography and working on his parent's farm in his free time. Sonam currently lives in Paro on his parent's farm. He is married and has two kids.

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**Breakfast time in Bhutan.**



## Financial Information

Note that Bhutan manages tourism in a manner that maintains harmony with their national quest to promote happiness and a healthy environment. Total numbers of visitors to the country are controlled, and all visitors work through local tour operators that charge a minimum per day tourism use fee for their services, part of which goes to the government to fund various programs in Bhutan. This makes Bhutan more expensive than adjacent countries, but it is a nation that cares for its culture, its people and its environment. The financial benefits of this controlled tourism, with an emphasis on ecotourism, go directly to the people, environment and preservation of Bhutanese culture. Few people in the world see this country and its birds, it is a gem, and a distinctly rare opportunity to be able to be a guest here

**FEE:** \$7200 from Bangkok. Price includes return flight from Bangkok (approximately \$950 cost).

**DEPOSIT:** \$500 per person

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE:** Nov 18, 2020

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional):** \$750

**LIMIT:** 12. Minimum 6.



**Black-chinned Yuhina.**

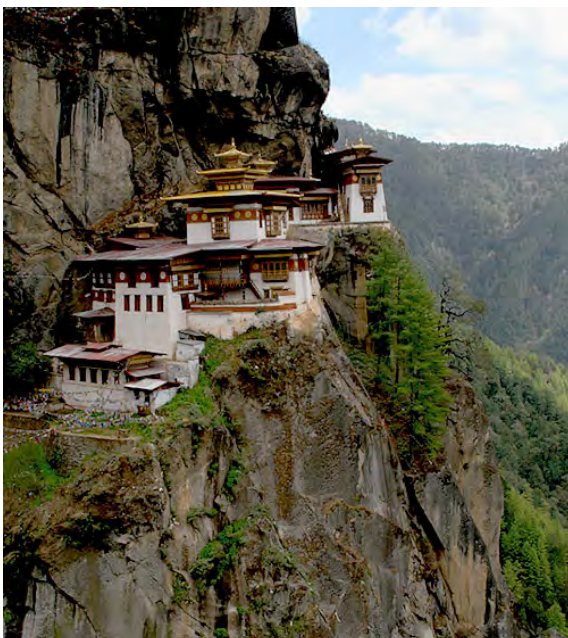
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Golden-throated Barbet.

## Additional Information



**DOCUMENTS:** A current passport valid six months beyond the date of your return is necessary for US citizens to enter Bhutan. All visitors (other than from a few select countries) to Bhutan require a tourist visa. We, along with the help of our colleagues will help procure a visa for you. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Bhutanese consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or phone or e-mail.

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Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey.

**AIR ARRANGEMENTS:** Please plan to arrive in Bangkok by March 18, 2021, we will overnight there (Hotel night included in tour fee) and be ready for our morning flight to Paro on the 19th. Flights back home at the end of the tour can be booked out of Bangkok at night on April 5, or for the following day (the latter is preferable). Note that we will be returning from Paro on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and the flight arrives late in the afternoon, so only a very **late** flight out of Bangkok will work on this date, and that assumes there is no delay out of Paro. If you require hotel at the airport on the 5<sup>th</sup>, we can arrange this for you, costs are approximately \$160 for a double (At the Novotel at the Bangkok Airport). There are other options that can be booked which are less expensive. Be sure to check with Alvaro's Adventures to confirm that the flights you have chosen will work with our itinerary and to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. We are not responsible for these fees.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The tour fee is \$7200 for one person in double occupancy from Bangkok. It includes all lodging from Day 0 through Day 17 in addition to the hotel night in Bangkok on March 18<sup>th</sup>. All meals from Dinner in Bangkok on Day 0 through breakfast on Day 18 are included, as return arrival in Bangkok will vary, no meals are included on the day we are back in Bangkok. Otherwise also included are all ground transportation, Bangkok to Paro flight, entrance fees, tips for baggage handling and meal service, and the guide services of the tour leaders. Alcoholic beverages and items of a personal nature are not included. The above fees do not include your airfare to and from Bangkok, airport taxes, visa fees, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for the tour is \$750. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, complete the enclosed Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$500** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit and the Release and Indemnity form must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by Nov 18, 2020. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have



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received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by Alvaro's Adventures.

**SMOKING:** This is a non-smoking tour.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Alvaro's Adventures for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute another guide for the original one. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members, and they will have the right to cancel their participation and receive a full refund.

Alvaro's Adventures's is a Registered Seller of Travel in the State of California (CST # 2105497). Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California. This ensures your right to a prompt refund: Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where the passenger is not at fault and has not canceled in violation of any terms and conditions previously clearly and conspicuously disclosed and agreed to by the passenger, all sums paid to the seller of travel for services not provided will be promptly paid to the passenger, unless the passenger advises the seller of travel in writing, after cancellation. This provision does not apply where the seller of travel has remitted the payment to another registered wholesale seller of travel or a carrier, without obtaining a refund, and where the wholesaler or provider defaults in providing the agreed-upon transportation or service. In this situation, the seller of travel must provide the passenger with a written statement accompanied by bank records establishing the disbursement of the payment, and if disbursed to a wholesale seller of travel, proof of current registration of that wholesaler.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we

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cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Alvaro's Adventures, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Alvaro's Adventures acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Alvaro's Adventures accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Alvaro's Adventures reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Alvaro's Adventures reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, and other pertinent matter provided by Alvaro's

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Adventures. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

4/20 AJ



**One of the most fantastic buildings you will ever see, Punakha Dzong.**