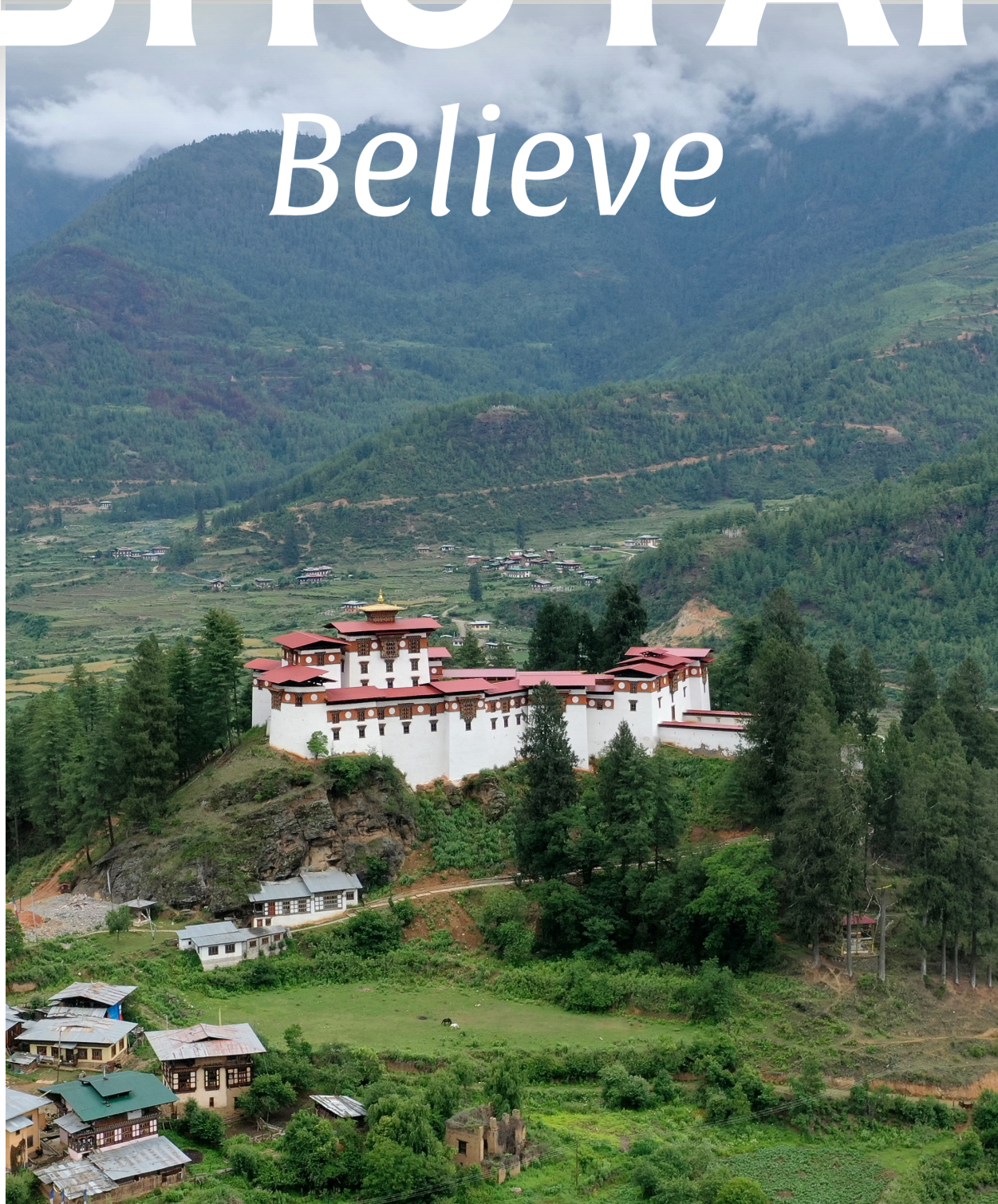


# BHUTAN

*Believe*



BHUTAN'S SUSTAINABLE TOURS & COMPANIES

DEPARTMENT  
OF TOURISM



switchasia







This Sustainable Tour catalogue is designed to curate a unique set of tour packages and list of tour operators and hotels from Bhutan selected under the sustainability certifications under SUSTOUR supported by ABTO, Switch Asia, ECEAT and Travelife. The project doesn't stop here, but will continue to add more Travelife trained tour operators and Bhutan Green Hotel Standard awarded hotels.

The design of this catalogue is funded by EU's SwitchAsia Program.  
Special thanks to the Department of Tourism, Bhutan for images in this brochure.











# WELCOME TO BHUTAN

Bhutan, renowned for its majestic landscapes and unique cultural experiences, is now more accessible than ever for travelers, thanks to several key improvements in travel procedures. We now have a simplified visa process, reduced the Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) to USD100 per day, and increased flight options to improve travel convenience.

## **Simplified Visa Process:**

Bhutan requires that all visitors have a visa, which can be applied for using a new online visa application system.

Typically, visas are processed within five working days, allowing for easier travel planning. The visas valid for up to 90 days. Visitors (except those from India, Bangladesh, and the Maldives\*), must obtain a visa prior to arrival. The application includes the daily Sustainable Development Fee and a USD 40 visa processing fee. The process is flexible, allowing applicants to apply directly online or through a tour operator or hotel. There is no cap on visitor numbers to Bhutan, and everyone is welcome.

Self-application for a travel visa is convenient, requiring tourists to fill out an online form with essential documents:

- 1) A digital copy of a valid passport
- 2) A recent digital passport photo
- 3) Arrival and departure dates
- 4) Valid travel insurance for the duration of planned travel
- 5) Payment information







# THE SUSTOUR PROJECT

The SUSTOUR Bhutan project is an innovative and practical approach to improving Sustainable Consumption and Production in Bhutan's tourism sector. Including all of the tourism value chain: tour operators, hotels, restaurants, guides and transportation, the project has introduced international standards of awards and certification as well as developed low carbon and carbon neutral tourism packages with strong international market appeal.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was the most significant source of foreign income and a key economic driver in Bhutan. In the first two years of the implementation SUSTOUR Bhutan project, the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the implementation of the project tremendously. In 2021 no foreign tourists visited the country. For most of the initial two years of the project Bhutan had been closed for visitors, and most Tour Operators had to close their businesses, and staff stayed home. By spring 2022, tourism was on the brink of collapse in the country, and desperately needed a comprehensive recovery pathway. Based on Bhutan's sustainable and green country image, one of the main pathways for Bhutan tourism industry is to become even greener, to benefit wider communities and be more resilient. The goal is for Bhutan to brand itself as the world's greenest and most responsible travel destination.

The project's aim is to contribute to a sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism development in Bhutan. The SUSTOUR Bhutan project supports Bhutan's transformation towards a green

economy by enhancing the sustainability and competitiveness of tourism as a key sector. At national level the project supports an enabling environment to improve Bhutan's Sustainable Consumption and Production policies, by supporting the development and implementation of Green Standards, training courses and tools. The project supports a Green Financing scheme supporting hotels, suppliers and small projects.

At district level the SUSTOUR project supports the development of sustainable inclusive and resilient destinations through 16 low-carbon tourism products, like the Taktsang monastery area in Paro and the areas around the Dzongs in Thimphu, Paro and Punakha, the Cheri and Tango monasteries and the Paro airport. At this level 100 hotels have been trained to go green. Around 200 of their suppliers are being trained as well. Besides the hotels, almost 100 tour operators are trained to become greener. At the project best practices will be shared in the South Asia region.

During the first year, a large part of the project focus was on the conditions, criteria and tools at national, destination and individual enterprise levels. This needed further development and strengthening in the second year. The second year involved establishing networks, internet data bases, and informing stakeholders, as well as establishing documentation protocols. In the third and fourth year, the focus was on strengthening stakeholders, at all three levels in Bhutan (national, destination and individual enterprise level), and initiating work at the international regional level.



In a Green Financing Scheme for micro and small enterprises initial reviews have been conducted for Bhutan specifically, but also other countries in the region. In 2022, several organizations and people were met to discuss a Green Financing Roundtable. These roundtable meetings have been organized successfully in 2022 and 2023.

In the first years of the project, an EU and regional market assessment was conducted. Additionally, a comprehensive outbound and inbound tour operator survey (100+ companies) assists in understanding Bhutan's competitive landscape and brand proposition positioning. In 2022, several possible travel package carbon management and compensation tools have been reviewed, and a thorough and implementable system for Bhutan is almost finalized. It supports the 16 low-carbon products in Paro, Thimphu and Punakha valleys, and calculates their carbon footprint as part of this project.

Finally at the national level, the SUSTOUR project and DOT have been reviewing the Green Destinations approach, together with the Green Destinations organization. A mixed team of government and private sector SUSTOUR related organizations visited the Green Destination Days in Athens, Greece in September 2022.

In the first years of the project (2020/2021), an initial Value Chain Analysis was conducted online. When the team could visit the districts in 2022, value chain data from almost 50 tour operators and 30 hotels, and about their main suppliers in Paro, Thimphu and Punakha valleys was gathered and compiled. During all the visits to the districts meetings were organized to study the waste management situation in the three valleys, Paro, Thimphu and Punakha and improvement plans were proposed.

SUSTOUR aims to replicate and scale-up the successful project practices to the wider South Asian region. Exchange of experiences and trainings are part of the work packages. Through the international networks of ECEAT and the project partners, lessons learned and standard and (training) tools developed will be disseminated in South Asian countries. These dissemination activities are planned for the second half of 2024

and the beginning of 2025.

By combining international and local expertise with an extensive stakeholder engagement process, the SUSTOUR project ensures broad support for three world-class initiatives, as examples of the current results of the project:

## **1. Tour Operator Awards!**

Since 2021, more than 90 tour operators have participated in SUSTOUR Travelife workshops to prepare their sustainability reports, strengthening their business operations and become better travel businesses. We are proud to announce that the first 16 companies have successfully been awarded Travelife PARTNER status!

## **2. Bhutan Green Hotels Standard**

An amazing World First, the SUSTOUR project has developed Bhutan Green Hotel standard, which will be applied to every accommodation in Bhutan! Aligned with international standards and developed since 2017 through extensive stakeholder engagement and testing, this will make Bhutan the first country in the world to have a country-wide sustainability assessment system for hotels.

## **3. Low Carbon and Carbon Neutral Tourism Packages**

In recognition of Bhutan's unique and extensive approach to sustainability, the SUSTOUR project is piloting a Greenhouse Gas calculation system that can be applied to business operations and tourism packages. The first output is the assessment of 16 tourism products, for example, Taktsang, Punakha Tshechu, Haa homestays and the Paro International Airport.

Sustainability and Net Zero Carbon tourism products are the hottest topic in international tourism, the SUSTOUR project has introduced world-class practices and tools to Bhutan. The launch of these initiatives is expected to generate strong interest in Bhutan's tourism products by travel media, online travel agents and traditional operators.











# TOUR PACKAGES

*Embark on an eco-conscious adventure with our Sustainable Bhutan Tour Package, designed to immerse you in the Kingdom's rich culture while minimizing your environmental footprint. Traverse serene landscapes, visit traditional villages, and experience mindful interactions with locals. Stay in eco-friendly accommodations that prioritize sustainable practices, from waste reduction to energy conservation.*







## CLASSIC BHUTAN

### *Tour Package*

Embark on a timeless journey with our Classic Bhutan Tour Package, showcasing the best of the Land of the Thunder Dragon. Begin in Paro, where the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery perches dramatically on a cliff. Explore Thimphu, Bhutan's vibrant capital, blending modernity with tradition as you visit the majestic Tashichho Dzong and the lively local markets. Journey to Punakha, a valley adorned with terraced fields and the impressive Punakha Dzong, a symbol of Bhutanese architecture. Immerse yourself in the spiritual and cultural heritage, witness traditional festivals, and savor the scenic beauty of Bhutan's valleys. This classic itinerary offers an unforgettable glimpse into Bhutan's enchanting landscapes and timeless traditions.

### **SUSTOUR recommended Low Carbon Tour Operation**

Tour: Classic Bhutan

Total In-country Carbon Footprint per person = 176kgCO<sub>2</sub>e

Reduction since 2019 average tour operation = -63%





 Thimphu

 Paro

 Gangtey

 Punakha

 Haa





## DRUK PATH TREK

### *Tour Package*

Walk the trails on the mesmerizing Druk Path Trek in Bhutan, a journey that unfolds like a living painting. As you ascend through pristine forests of rhododendrons and alpine meadows, each step reveals breathtaking panoramas of the majestic Himalayas. The trail leads to shimmering mountain lakes, like the tranquil Jimilang Tsho, reflecting the azure sky and snow-capped peaks. En route, ancient dzongs and monasteries whisper tales of Bhutanese history, adding cultural richness to the scenic tapestry. The climax awaits at the iconic Taktsang Monastery, perched dramatically on a cliff, rewarding trekkers with a sense of accomplishment and awe-inspiring views. Druk Path Trek epitomizes Bhutan's natural grandeur, weaving spirituality, and adventure into an unforgettable high-altitude odyssey.

#### **SUSTOUR recommended Low Carbon Tour Operation**

Tour: Druk Path Trek

Total In-country Carbon Footprint per person = 118kgCO<sub>2</sub>e

Reduction since 2019 average tour operation = -65%



**Jigmelangtsho Lake**



**Phajoding**



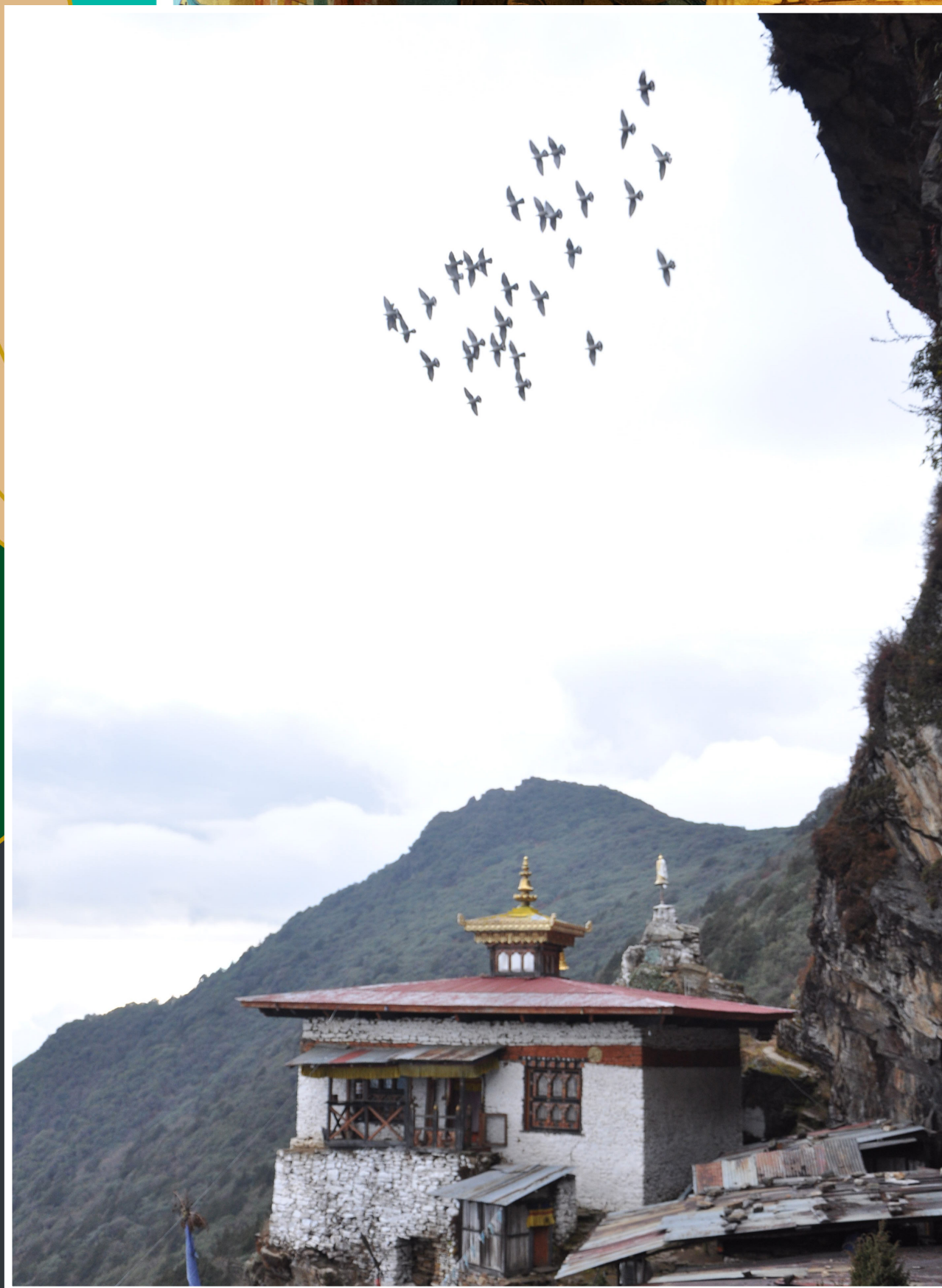
**Jela Dzong**



**Janetsho Lake**







UTA  
believe







# DISCOVER BHUTAN

## *Tour Package*

Embark on an enriching journey discovering the authentic side to Bhutan, delving into the heart of this Himalayan kingdom through its distinct flavors, heritage, and community spirit. Immerse yourself in gastronomic delights during immersive food tours, savoring Bhutanese cuisine in local eateries. Uncover the kingdom's rich history through curated museum visits, exploring artifacts that narrate Bhutan's unique cultural evolution. Engage with local communities, participating in traditional activities, and forging meaningful connections. This holistic itinerary promises an authentic exploration of Bhutan, blending culinary discoveries, museum insights, and community engagement to unveil a unique tapestry of the kingdom's charm. Join us for an unforgettable voyage into Bhutan's vibrant culture and hospitality.

### **SUSTOUR recommended Low Carbon Tour Operation**

Tour: Discover Bhutan

Total In-country Carbon Footprint per person = 116kgCO<sub>2</sub>e

Reduction since 2019 average tour operation = -56%

 **Paro**

 **Thimphu**

 **Punakha**

 **Haa**





# BHUTAN

*Believe*

## HEART OF THE HIMALAYAS *Tour Package*

Embark on a soul-enriching spiritual sojourn in Bhutan. Traverse the serene landscapes of Paro, Thimphu, and Punakha to discover ancient temples and monasteries nestled amidst the Himalayas. Explore the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery, perched dramatically on a cliff, and feel the spiritual energy of Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest temples. Dive into the cultural heart of Thimphu with visits to Tashichho Dzong and the revered Changangkha Lhakhang. In Punakha, absorb the tranquility of Chimi Lhakhang and the grandeur of Punakha Dzong. This curated journey promises a harmonious blend of breathtaking landscapes and divine spirituality, offering a fulfilling and transformative experience in the mystical kingdom of Bhutan.

### **SUSTOUR recommended Low Carbon Tour Operation**

Tour: Heart of the Himalaya

Total In-country Carbon Footprint per person = 104kgCO<sub>2</sub>e

Reduction since 2019 average tour operation = -60%

 **Paro**

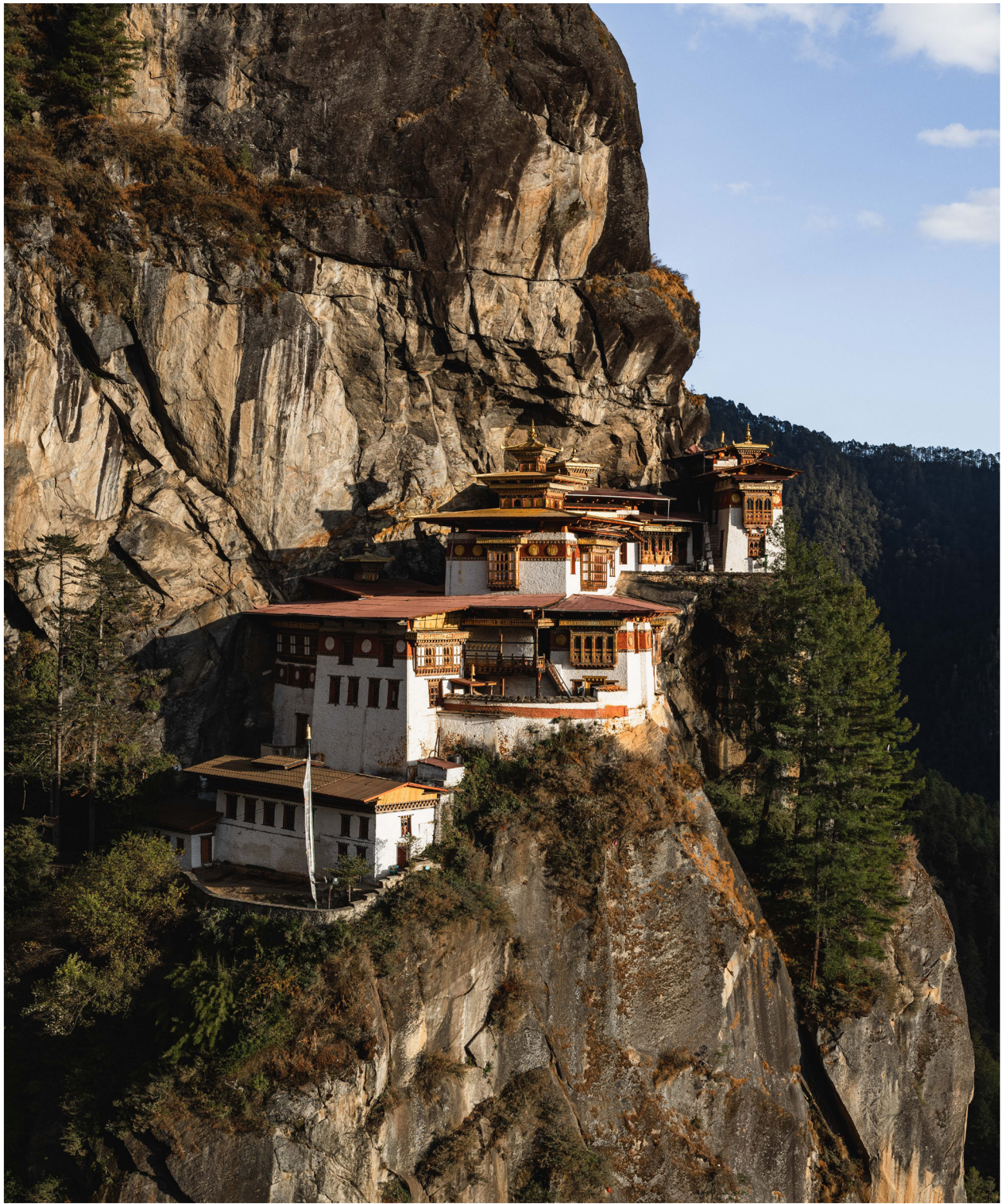
 **Thimphu**

 **Punakha**

 **Haa**













# BHUTAN IN STYLE

## *Tour Package*

Enjoy a vibrant exploration of Bhutan's Textile Tapestry tour package, delving into the kingdom's rich artistic heritage. Immerse yourself in the intricate world of Bhutanese textiles with visits to traditional weaving centers and local artisans. Witness the creation of Kishuthara and other exquisite fabrics, connecting with the skilled hands preserving centuries-old techniques. Dive into Thimphu's emerging fashion scene, discovering contemporary expressions rooted in tradition. Engage with local artists in their ateliers, unveiling Bhutan's dynamic artistry. This curated journey blends cultural immersion with a celebration of Bhutanese craftsmanship, offering an enchanting tapestry of textiles, fashion, and artistry that defines the kingdom's unique creative spirit.

SUSTOUR recommended Low Carbon Tour Operation

Tour: Bhutan in Style

Total In-country Carbon Footprint per person = 144kgCO<sub>2</sub>e

Reduction since 2019 average tour operation = -62%

 **Thimphu**

 **Paro**



 **Punakha**

