

A person wearing a vibrant red, flowing robe is captured in motion, running across a light-colored stone-paved area. The person is barefoot, and their shadow is cast onto the ground. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting at night or in low light. The overall mood is dynamic and artistic.

# A HIMALAYAN PHOTOGRAPHY EXPEDITION

WITH MICHAEL TUREK

OCTOBER 28TH TO NOVEMBER 9TH 2024



Embark on an extraordinary 11-day journey across the otherworldly Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, accompanied by world-renowned documentary photographer and Kodak Ambassador, Michael Turek.

From the gravity-defying Tiger's Nest Monastery to the temple of the Divine Madman, this trip combines spectacular natural wonders, unique architecture and vibrant heritage, all of which you will capture on film under Turek's expert guidance.



Turek will encourage you to embrace the limitations of film to liberate your creativity. By being intentional about your choices, you'll experience the beauty of Bhutan at a slower and more purposeful pace, whilst also honing your skills as a photographer.

Immerse yourself in the bustling capital of Thimphu with its monuments, museums and markets, then journey deep into the kingdom's heartland, exploring five distinctive valleys. In the tropical Punakha Valley, explore Bhutanese history and architecture through its magnificent dzongs. In the emerald valley of Paro, discover the essence of peace amongst its beautiful rice paddies and ancient temples.

Throughout your adventure, we return nightly to the understated luxury, world-class cuisine and holistic wellness of our COMO Uma Bhutan or partner lodges. You will spend four nights at COMO Uma Paro, two nights at COMO Uma Punakha, two nights at Gangtey Lodge Phobjikha, and two nights at a Bumthang homestay.





## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit Taktsang "Tiger's Nest" Monastery, one of Bhutan's architectural highlights
- Immerse yourself in the bustling streets and historic monuments of Thimphu, Bhutan's capital city
- Walk across rice paddies and farmhouses to reach Chimmi Lhakhang, a 15th-century fertility temple
- Search for rare black-necked cranes in their seasonal winter sanctuary of Phobjikha Valley
- Make the climb to the craggy heights of the Chumbu Monastery and make an offering to the 'Floating Goddess'
- Trek Bhutan's spectacular mountain trails and take in unparalleled views of the Himalayas
- Pay your respects at Jakar Dzong ('Castle of the White Bird'), one of the largest dzongs in Bhutan
- Celebrate the fluidity of life and nature with a traditional Buddhist butter lamp ceremony
- Try your hand at Bhutan's national sport of archery on COMO Uma Paro's own archery ground
- Explore Gangtey Goemba, a majestic hillside monastery dating from the 16th century







ABOUT YOUR HOST  
MICHAEL TUREK



Michael Turek is an American fine art film photographer who works on documentary assignments for clients including The Financial Times, The Guardian, Architectural Digest and The Paris Review. His book, *CONTRAIL*, published by Roman Nvmerals in 2021, is included in the MoMA Archives and Library. His first photographic monograph, *SIBERIA* was published by Damiani in 2020. Turek is a long-time Leica film camera shooter (M3 and M-A) and has developed a blended exposure technique that is specific to Leica film cameras.

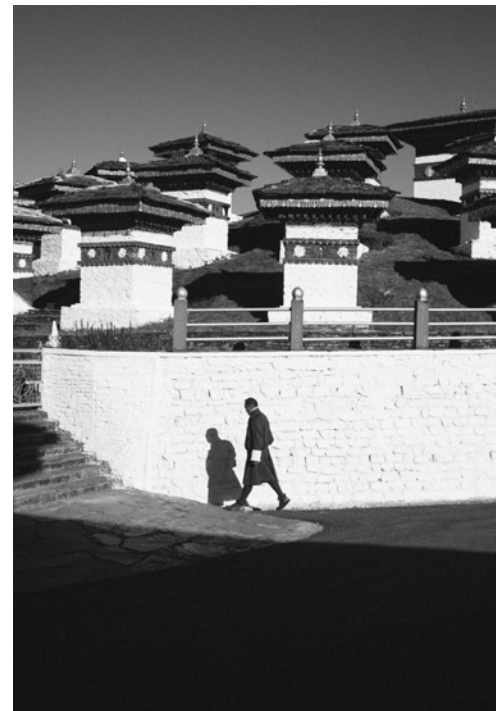
Turek has made repeat visits to Bhutan, and is particularly interested in the cultural fabric of the Himalayas, and how successful film photography can capture the grain of the sounds, scents and saturated tones. In this retreat, Turek will be joined by Leica specialist Peter Dooling, who heads up the camera brand's Photo Workshops Program worldwide.











## DAY-BY-DAY SCHEDULE

### DAY 1

#### **ARRIVE PARO – CHECK IN – ZURIG MONASTERY HIKE**

Upon arrival at Paro International Airport, you will be greeted by COMO staff before making the 10-minute transfer to COMO Uma Paro. With sweeping views of the Himalayas and an array of pine-clad mountain slopes, this 38-acre estate is the perfect point from which to begin your journey.

After checking in and taking some time to settle in to your new home-

from-home, you will meet the rest of your group and your expedition leader Michael Turek. Together you will take your first tour, winding through pine forests high above COMO Uma Paro to the picturesque grounds of the fortress-like Zurig Monastery, where the rugged mountain terrain is among the most visually stunning in the world.

Overnight: COMO Uma Paro



## **DAY 2**

### **DRIVE FROM PARO TO PUNAKHA VALLEY VIA THIMPHU AND DOCHU LA**

If you choose to, your guide will arrange to bring you to a nearby monastery for a butter lamp ceremony — a spiritual blessing and traditional welcome to the kingdom — before embarking on your day. During this symbolic Buddhist ceremony, you will witness monks lighting lamps filled with ghee, in place of the originally used yak butter. The ceremony is meant to dispel ignorance, celebrate the fluidity of life and acknowledge the interdependency of nature.

During the journey from COMO Uma Paro to COMO Uma Punakha, you can stop off in the nation's largest city, Thimphu, with an immersive tour taking in some of the major attractions, including the Buddha Dordenma statue, the National Memorial Chorten, a view of Trashi Chhoe Dzong and the Folk Heritage Museum (exact tour itinerary varies). The capital city sprawls across the wooded western hillside of the Wang Chhu River, surrounded by verdant rice paddies and towering peaks.

After leaving Thimphu, the drive to Punakha becomes even more spectacular, winding snake-like up the 3,000m-high mountain pass of Dochu La, offering views to 108 chortens (Buddhist shrines), forests of fluttering prayer flags and, on a clear day, sweeping views of the Himalayan range

Duration of drive: three to four hours (126km)  
Difficulty: Easy to moderate  
Overnight: COMO Uma Punakha

## **DAY 3**

### **CHIMMI LHAKHANG, PUNAKHA DZONG AND KHAMSUM YULLEY NAMGYAL CHORTEN**

#### **Morning**

The morning starts with a short walk through farmhouses and rice paddies to reach Chimmi Lhakhang, a 15th-century fertility temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint, perhaps better known as the 'Divine Madman'. This site has long been a pilgrimage for couples hoping to start a family, adorned with colourful fertility symbols and bold statues.

Heading further down the valley, the 300-year-old Punakha Dzong comes into view. Built in the 17th century by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (who founded the Kingdom of Bhutan), the fortress once housed the country's government. It is now the winter home of Je Khenpo, the head abbot of Bhutan, along with a retinue of 1,000 red-robed monks.

#### **Afternoon**

After lunch, the tour takes you on a walk through homesteads and farmland to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, a hilltop shrine built by the royal family. This is a full day of exploration through the lush Punakha Valley which — at 1,200m — is low enough for bananas and oranges to grow alongside the footpath.

Duration: six to seven hours  
Difficulty: Easy to moderate  
Overnight: COMO Uma Punakha







#### **DAY 4 PUNAKHA VALLEY TO GANGTEY VALLEY VIA WANGDUE PHODRANG**

Descending from your hillside hotel, cross the river and pause briefly to admire the Wangduephodrang Dzong. This fortress is dramatically perched on a hill spur at the confluence of the Puna Tsang Chhu and Dang Chhu rivers.

Continuing your journey, you will drive steadily through the semi-tropical vegetation until reaching Phobjikha, one of Bhutan's most delightful valleys. Nestled on the western slope of the Black Mountains, this valley is renowned as the seasonal sanctuary of the rare black-necked cranes, who spend their winter months here (from the last week in October to the middle of February). The view from your Lodge encompasses the expansive wetlands which are peppered with small monasteries and temples, all awaiting exploration.

Duration of drive: three hours (81 km)  
Overnight: Gangtey Lodge, Phobjikha

#### **DAY 5 NATURE TRAIL WALK, KHEWANG TEMPLE, NATURE STUDY CENTRE AND GANGTEY GOEMBA**

After breakfast, you will hike through the beautiful Phobjikha valley — widely regarded as one of finest trials from which to experience Bhutan's natural beauty — to Khewang Temple. The temple was built in the 15th century by Trulku Penjor Gyeltshen, who was believed to be an incarnation of the great Tibetan nyingmapa master Kuenkhen Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1364).

Following a picnic lunch, you will

visit the nature study centre. Funded by the Bhutanese government with assistance from the World Wildlife Fund, this centre is dedicated to conservation studies and education of local farmers and students. Next, you will make your way to Gangtey Goemba. Sitting in a commanding position over the valley, the renowned 16th century monastery is home to a school, meditation spaces and monk's quarters, as well as the legacy of Pema Lingpa, a revered Buddhist saint and discoverer of spiritual treasures.

Duration: five to seven hours including (two hours Nature Trail walk or longer option)  
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate  
Overnight: Gangtey Lodge, Phobjikha

#### **DAY 6 GANGTEY TO BUMTHANG VIA PELE LA, CHENDEBJI CHORTEN AND TRONGSA**

The morning begins with a drive over Pele La — complete with grazing yaks and a stop in Sephu to shop for woven bamboo products — to Chendebji Chorten, which is built in a style similar to the famous Swayambhunath complex in Kathmandu.

Continuing through the forest, you will come to a viewpoint offering spectacular sights of Trongsa Dzong. Perched on a spur overlooking the Mangde River, it was built in 1648 as an ancestral home and district administration centre, with strategic views that stretched for many kilometers.

The rest of your journey to Bumthang leads sedately through charming villages, monasteries, workshops and forests before reaching Jakar, the market town serving the four Bumthang valleys.

Duration of drive: four to five hours (140 km)  
Difficulty: Easy  
Overnight: Bumthang Homestay



**DAY 7**  
**JAKAR DZONG, WANGDICHHOLING PALACE, KURJEY LHA KHANG AND JAMBAY LHA KHANG**

Your seventh day offers numerous day walks and options of places to explore, including Jakar Dzong, Wangdichholing Palace and the impressive Kurje Lhakhang (temple) on the western side of Bumthang Chhu (river).

Jakar Dzong ('Castle of the White Bird') was built by Minjur Tenpa, the third 'Druk Desi' — or temporal ruler — in 1646 A.D. It is one of the biggest dzongs in Bhutan, with the surrounding walls of approximately a kilometre in circumference. You will also visit Jambay Lhakhang, one of the oldest temples in the kingdom.

Duration: five to six hours  
Difficulty: Easy to moderate  
Overnight: Bumthang Homestay

**DAY 8**  
**BUMTHANG TO PARO BY DOMESTIC FLIGHT**

On the morning of the eighth day, you will make your way from Bumthang to Paro by domestic flight, a journey of approximately 40 minutes. Your vehicle will be waiting for you at the Paro International Airport to transfer you to COMO Uma Paro, where you can spend the rest of the day relaxing in the peace of your surroundings.

Please be aware that domestic flights in Bhutan are prone to cancellation due to unpredictable weather conditions in remote areas. Sometimes operational complications can occur.



**Optional: Drakharpo Monastery and Archery Lesson**

A short drive from COMO Uma Paro is the 90-minute walking trail to Drakharpo Monastery. The temple is precariously perched on the edge of a rocky cliff and is one of the main sacred sites in Bhutan. Here you will find the body-imprint of Vajra-yogini and a stone boot believed to belong to Guru Rinpoche, venerated widely by adherents of Tibetan Buddhism as a "second Buddha".

In the afternoon, we invite you to try your hand at Bhutan's two most popular sports on COMO Uma Paro's own archery ground (Bha Cho). 'Khuru' —

where competitors launch large outdoor darts — is a very popular traditional Bhutanese game played in most villages, whilst archery is the national sport of Bhutan. Every village has its own archery range and high-spirited competitions, usually accompanied by a banquet, and are part of all festive occasions. Using bamboo bows, teams of archers shoot at targets only 30 centimetres in diameter from a distance of 140 meters, each cheered on by a noisy crowd of supporters.

Duration: five to six hours  
Difficulty: Easy to moderate  
Overnight: COMO Uma Paro



## DAY 9

### FLOATING GODDESS DAY TREK

After breakfast you will be transferred by road to the river valley of Do Chhu. From here, you will begin your hike along a remote mountain trail, passing through tiny hamlets and ancient forests as you follow the course of the river. In spring, the different species of flowering rhododendrons that bloom here create a riot of colour.

As we reach the head of the valley and the trail gets steeper, you will see the Chumbu Monastery rising high above the craggy peaks. The monks at this spectacularly positioned and remote monastery afford all pilgrims a warm welcome, particularly if they are bearing small gifts and offerings for the supernatural statue of the 'Flying Yogini' that seems to float in the air. Having paid your respects, climb higher to a beautiful mountain lake, before bidding the monks a fond farewell and heading for home. This evening presents another opportunity to receive photography tuition from Michael.

Duration: eight hours  
Difficulty: Moderate (Guided with picnic)  
Overnight: COMO Uma Paro

## DAY 10

### TAKTSANG HIKE (TIGER'S NEST) – UGYEN TSEMO - ZANGTOPELRI

#### Morning

The historic Paro Valley is the focus of today's activities, culminating in a visit to the Taktsang 'Tiger's Nest' Monastery, one of Bhutan's most important and iconic cultural sites. According to legend, this cliffside is where Guru Rinpoche landed on the back of a flying tigress, bringing Buddhism to Bhutan from Tibet.

The trip starts early in order to avoid the hot sun during the two-hour climb to the Tiger's Nest viewpoint, which involves a steep hike passing a waterfall and ends among beautiful murals at the monastery's main entrance.

If time allows, there is the possibility of heading further up to visit the remote temples of Zangtopelri, built in 1853. Sitting on the opposite ridge overlooking Taktsang, this is the position to take the best picture of Tiger's Nest. You will then continue to the summit of the ridge directly above Taktsang Pelphung, to Ugyen Tsemo, which contains beautiful frescoes of Guru Padmakara. The view from Ugyen Tsemo is well worth the climb. After descending, you will enjoy a picnic lunch.

#### Afternoon

After lunch – either a prepared picnic or from the charming Taktsang cafeteria – you return to COMO Uma Paro, where you can recharge on your final night, enjoying the steam rooms, gym and swimming pool, or indulging in one of our COMO Shambhala treatments.

Duration: six to eight hours  
Difficulty: Moderate to hard  
Overnight: COMO Uma Paro

## DAY 11

### DEPART BHUTAN

Your 10-minute transfer to Paro International Airport will be arranged according to your flight schedule.











#### **INCLUSIONS**

- Accommodation for four nights at Uma Paro and two nights at Uma Punakha on a full board basis, including picnic lunches during excursion days (excluding beverages)
- Accommodation for two nights at Gangtey Lodge, Phobjikha and two nights at Bumthang Homestay (excluding beverages)
- Ten days of privately guided excursions, taking in the highlights of the Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Phobjikha and Bumthang Valleys
- The private services of an experienced English-speaking Bhutanese guide
- One 60-minute COMO Shambhala body treatment
- COMO Shambhala treatments as mentioned in the itinerary
- Complimentary use of the library, swimming pool, steam room and gym at COMO Uma Paro
- Complimentary wireless internet throughout COMO Uma Paro and COMO Uma Punakha
- Private airport transfers and transport around Bhutan
- All Bhutanese government visa, sustainable development fees, service charge and sales tax
- All museum and visitor centre entry fees and road permits
- Complimentary one-hour daily yoga class whilst at COMO Uma Paro (except Sundays)

#### **EXCLUSIONS**

- Travel to and from Bhutan
- Additional hotel nights before or after the workshop
- Gratuities for local guide/drivers
- Alcoholic beverages

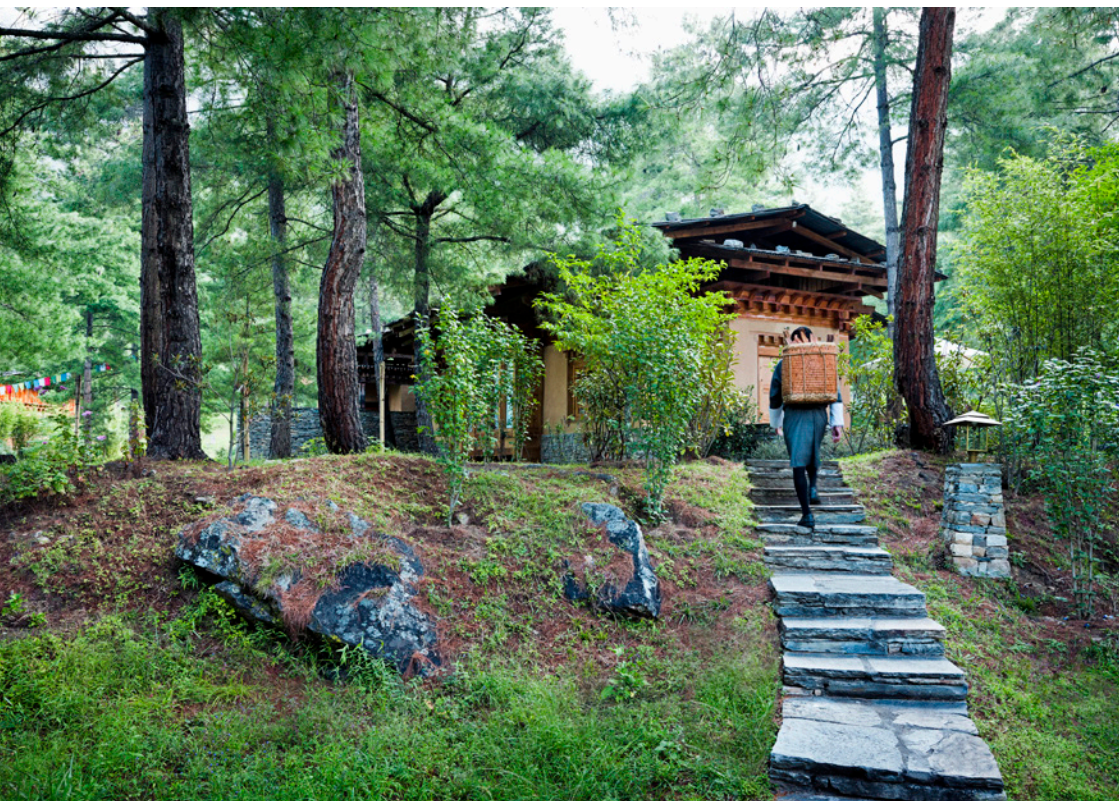


## YOUR ACCOMMODATION

With COMO Uma Bhutan, the Himalayan Kingdom's splendour is revealed to you through scenic drives, walks and enchanting heritage sites. Each night, you will return safely to the comfort of our two COMO lodges.

### COMO UMA PARO

COMO Uma Paro is nestled above the emerald Paro Valley, on a hill overlooking the rice paddies and ancient monasteries. Sequester yourself in our private rooms that combine traditional Bhutanese colour and craftsmanship with modern amenities. The location immerses you in the country's rich cultural tapestry, making it easy to explore the rest of the valley, including the precarious Tiger's Nest Monastery perched 3,100m above the valley floor. As always, you can expect exceptional service and world-class cuisine, with food inspired by the country's local flavours.



### COMO UMA PUNAKHA

Five hours from Paro by car, over a mountain pass dotted with prayer flags, COMO Uma Punakha stands high above a serpentine bend in the Mo Chhu River, just west of the lesser-visited Punakha Valley. Amidst the alpine serenity, you can hike, white-water raft and explore temples like the Punakha Dzong, home to a retinue of 1,000 red-robed monks. After full days of excursions through Bhutan's heartlands, you'll stay in one of just 10 rooms at the lodge – each with sweeping views of the lush wilderness and an iconic, locally-inspired design.



## ACTIVITY LEVEL

Most of the locations we will visit are accessible only by hiking, and although most are easy to moderate hikes, a good level of physical level physical fitness is required. The terrain is uneven, can be steeply inclined, and will at times be wet and muddy. The ascent to the Tiger's Nest is particularly steep (involving a 6-kilometre round trip hike that ascends 518 metres), although scrambling and technical mountaineering equipment are not necessary. The weather and temperature will be mixed, with the possibility of occasional showers with notable humidity in the Punakha valley. A camera backpack is strongly recommended, as are hiking sticks if you prefer them.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

We strongly recommend that you take out travel insurance against medical and personal accident risks (including repatriation costs, air ambulance and helicopter rescue services), as well as cancellation insurance. You should be aware that some policies may not cover travel to Bhutan and may not cover activities such as trekking, mountain biking and rafting. Please ensure that your policy provides a sufficient level of protection and covers you for the activities involved in this package. You must carry proof of insurance (e.g. your insurance certificate) with you in Bhutan.

## PLEASE NOTE

This itinerary is intended as a guide only. Routes and weather conditions may mean variations to the programme, which may affect the availability of views and panoramas described. Please be aware that all times stated are approximate, and may vary with individual and group fitness and interest levels.



COMO Uma Bhutan provides complimentary drinking water for all guided itineraries. If you have any special dietary requirements, please advise us in advance. Where stated, trips include lunch picnics prepared by our chefs. Please place your picnic order the day before departure through your guide or at the Activity Desk. Throughout your stay, you have the option to participate in a range of extra outdoor activities at an additional fee.

## TRAVEL TO BHUTAN

COMO Uma Bhutan handles the whole booking process on your behalf, including flights via Druk Air or Bhutan Airlines. However, the price of flights is not included in the package and it is advisable to book well in advance to secure seats. We also handle visa application processing (included in the package). It normally takes two to three weeks to process the visa.

Please read this document in conjunction with your confirmation letter and pre-departure information.

For more information on COMO Uma Bhutan, including the full range of itineraries and services we offer – from tailor-made adventures, overnight treks and biking itineraries to provisions for groups and the hosting of special events – please refer to the website [www.comohotels.com/bhutan](http://www.comohotels.com/bhutan)

Guests can choose to combine their break in Bhutan with a stay in Thailand at COMO Metropolitan Bangkok. For special rates when combining a stay in the city with one of our COMO Uma Bhutan itineraries, please email [res.uma.bhutan@comohotels.com](mailto:res.uma.bhutan@comohotels.com) or call +975 8 279 999





For further information, please contact COMO Uma Bhutan:

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