



Gourmet Adventure  
12 Days • Bhutan

## **BHUTAN FOR FOODIES**

Bhutan gourmet adventure that balances spicy cuisine with tree-lined trails. Himalayan cooking embraces many influences from Tibet to India, and we'll get to explore it all in detail from farmers markets to grandma's chilli-cheese.

# Heavy on the gourmet and easy on the walking

## Arrival in Paro & Thimphu

- Our team will collect you and the group at Paro Airport
- All meals are included
- Buddha Dordenma Breakfast
- Forest Walk above Thimphu
- Momos in the capital

## Punakha

- Rice Harvest and Rice Puffs
- Taxi Stop Chicken Curry
- Monks at Punakha Dzong
- Rice and Spice Farmhouse Lunch
- Mo Chu River Walk

## Phobjikha Valley

- Lawa La Descent into Phobjikha
- Rhododendron Picnic Lunch
- Ema-Datsi and Suja Lunch
- Phobjikha Valley Nature Trail
- Ezay and and Momo Cooking Class
- Monks at Gangtey Gompa

## Haa Valley

- Travel day to reach Haa Valley
- Chillli Chop Lunch Stop
- Haa Summer Festival
- Dancing, Exhibitions, Food Stalls
- Buckwheat and Yak Meat Dinner
- Yak Cheese and Rhododendrons

## Paro Valley

- Blue Poppies at Chele La
- Mushroom Farm
- Dhal Bhat from the South
- Blessing with the Monks
- Tiger's Nest Day Trip

## WHY WE LOVE IT

One of the most unique culinary adventures we've ever designed, Bhutan embraces influences from India to Tibet. A fascinating place to explore the Himalayas, the culture and the cuisine. You'll be travelling with local chef Tashi Dendup, and our gourmet escort Shellie Froidevaux for the duration of your tour. Shellie and Tashi will be cooking up some treats plus sharing their insights into the Bhutanese way of life.

We'll take walks through rhododendron forests, spend a day at a cultural festival and eat with the local people.

An optional hike up to the Tiger's Nest Monastery is also included. But the main focus will be street food, traditional cooking and produce of the Himalayas.

You can travel with a conscience knowing that part of your tour cost goes directly toward funding of local schools, to improve the education outcomes of Bhutanese children.



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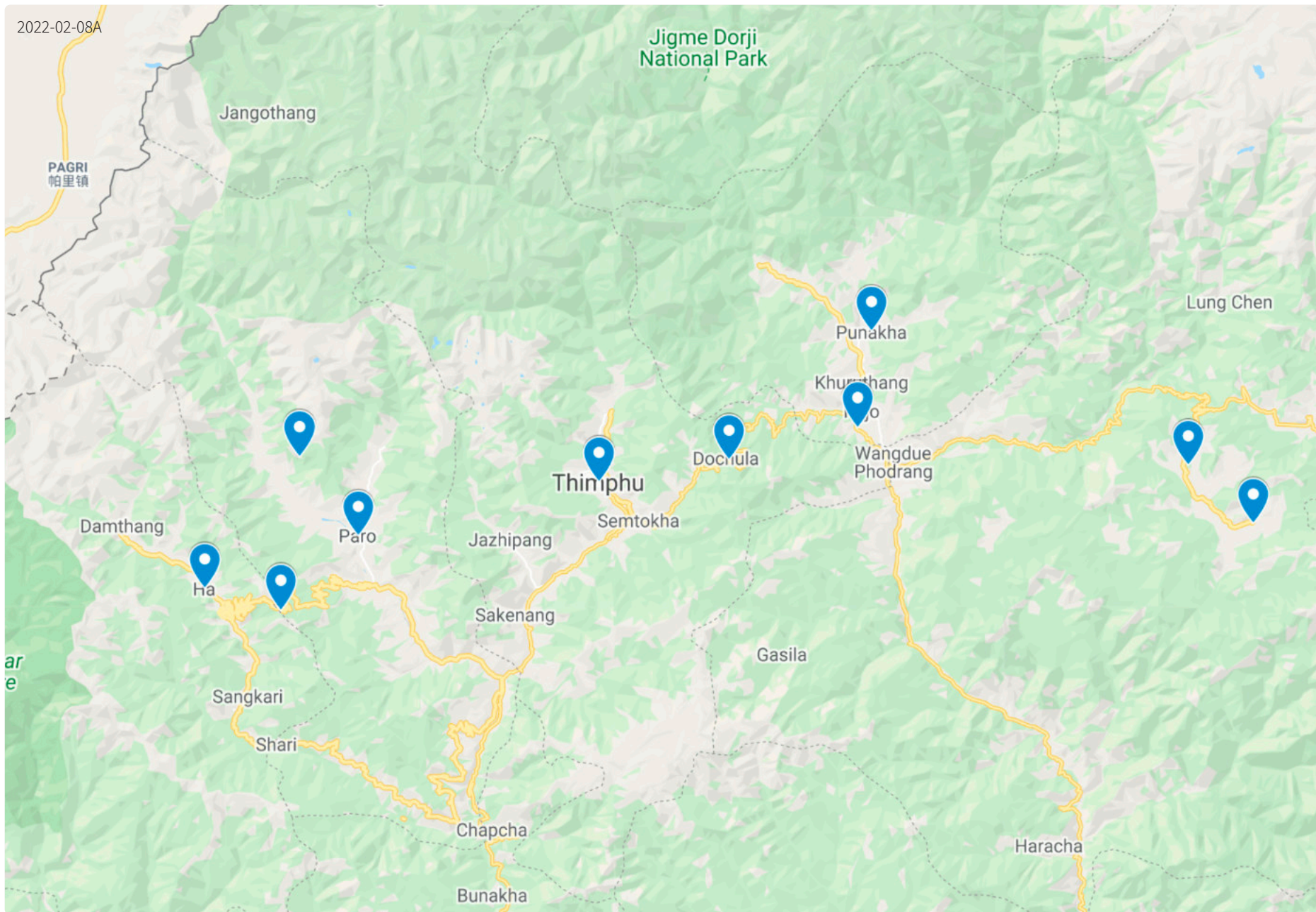
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# DETAILED ITINERARY

## Day 1 • THIMPHU

### ARRIVAL

After our airport pick up, we start our adventure by heading to the city of Thimphu and a taste of Himalayan Momos. We'll be eating with the locals before making a few cultural stops to get familiar with the Bhutanese temples and arts.

We keep the day 1 itinerary flexible because the scheduled flight times can vary.

The first evening we will enjoy a special Bhutanese banquet with a lovely family in Thimphu, and everyone will get a chance to meet Shellie Froidevaux, our tour escort. Shellie is best known for her recipes and cooking shared online as "Iron Chef Shellie".

## Day 2 • PUNAKHA

Before leaving the Thimphu Valley we have a special early morning visit to a special statue of Buddha, followed by picnic breakfast and a short downhill walk through the forest. Tashi Dendup is our local chef and he will be organising a number of special meals during the trip.

We will have time to return to the hotel to finish packing before starting our drive to the sub-tropical valley of Punakha (1,300m). Our route goes via the high mountain pass of Dochua La at 3,000m, where magnificent views of the snow capped peaks can be enjoyed on a clear day.

On the way we will divert to visit some rice farmers who also cook up their own puffed rice cakes for sale at the local markets. The puffs are made by hand from ground rice flour and a simple press, before being cooked in oil.

For dinner that night we will head into town and enjoy some southern style cooking at Raven's Restaurant. This local eat is popular with taxi drivers in the area for the chicken curry and excellent dhal baht.

## Day 3 • PUNAKHA

The morning is a good time to visit Punakha Dzong, one of the most impressive temples in the country. In the winter time monks travel to Punakha to escape the colder weather, enjoying the sub-tropical climate of these lower elevations.

For lunch we're heading to a special farmhouse for a traditional Bhutanese feast. The owners are friends of Tashi, and happen to be excellent farmers who grow all their own produce for the kitchen and even make their own cheese.

While visiting we will learn a little about the weaving and textile techniques that have thrived in the Himalayas for thousands of years. We have an easy walk through the rice fields and along the river in the afternoon to work off some of the calories, and a chance to cross the longest suspension bridge in Bhutan that spans a 200m crossing. We'll have dinner at the hotel that night .

## Day 4 • PHOBJIKHA

We don't have to leave too early the next day and will have time for another downhill walk to catch some of the birdlife in the forests or by the river. Shellie and Tashi will also need to do some shopping at the local market in preparation for our picnic lunch on the road.

The drive out of Punakha Valley takes us high into the Rhododendron forests of the Himalayas with stunning views of the surrounding peaks, and glimpses of Tibet. We leave the highway and begin our walk to Lawa La, a small mountain pass where yak herders winter their animals.



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From there we walk down into the township of Gangtey and visit the beautiful monastery that overlooks the valley.

Once we arrive at the monastery we'll meet some of the monks and have time to explore this stunningly beautiful building. It will be peaceful and quiet during our visit, with only prayers and chanting within the walls. We drive onwards down the valley to our hotel and will dine-in that evening.

### **Day 5 • PHOBJIKHA**

We start the day with a drive across the valley to meet a village of potato farmers. We go every year and give them photos of the children, taken from our previous visit. Turnips, potatoes and mustard greens are how this village makes a living. They make a nice cup of tea too though and we'll have a Q&A session with one of the families and get to know better what's involved to grow produce in the Himalayas.

We'll walk back across the valley to meet Tashi and enjoy a cooking demonstration on the "chilli and cheese" dish that Bhutanese love so well, and a hot cooked lunch. After lunch we do an easy walk along the Gangtey Nature Trail. The route takes in sections of forest and farmland as we walk through a pristine sub-alpine landscape.

### **Day 6 • PHOBJIKHA**

Today we head even further down the valley to a place where western travellers rarely venture. Gogona will be a day trip from our hotel, a unique community that has embraced dairy production and make a range of European style cheeses. They also grow various mushrooms. So you won't need many more clues to figure out what Tashi and Shellie will be cooking up for lunch.

We hope to get back to our accommodation in the mid-afternoon, and have time for Tashi and Shellie to setup for a momo making class. Special attention will be made to the chilli sauce for these momos, which is often a matter of great debate between Bhutanese families.

### **Day 7 • HAA**

#### TRAVEL DAY

Today is a big travel day, with a long drive to return west towards the edge of Paro and then onto the next valley known as Haa. We'll make stops on the way for a Bathu Soup lunch break and an afternoon coffee in Thimphu. Time permitting. It will be dark by the time we roll into our Haa hotel, so a rewarding dinner is planned featuring the local buckwheat dumplings, freshly prepared by our hosts.

### **Day 8 • HAA**

#### FESTIVAL

Today is a full day of enjoying the Summer Festival. We're just a 15 minute drive from the masked dances, exhibitions and various food and beverage stalls. Our guides will give you an orientation of the festival and the farmers market, then leave you to enjoy.

We meet up for lunch and enjoy some food prepared by the stalls. The afternoon will give time to settle into the monks performing their spiritual dances, and to get in line for a blessing. The mix of festival, food and monks is a lot to absorb, so for dinner we have a simple meal at the hotel and a chance to rest up.



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### Day 9 • HAA

Today is also a festival day and the farmers market will be in full swing too. We'll head into the festival and enjoy some more of the dancing monks. We meet for lunch and then after lunch we have a light walk planned to enjoy a little of the landscape in Haa as we head closer to the hotel.

Dinner this evening is a big celebration of Haa cuisine, but also embracing the Lay ethnic group who live higher up the mountains. The Lay are yak herders who come down at certain times of the year to trade yak meat, yak cheese and wild herbs collected from the alpine ecosystem. Our evening feast will also include Philu, a special hard cheese made from yak milk at very high altitudes and infected with wild yeast from the Rhododendron trees.

### Day 10 • PARO

We leave the Haa Valley and head back to our starting point of Paro. We cross the high pass at Chele La where the blue poppies can be found blooming in summer. We'll stop here to set some prayer flags in the wind.

We'll get to Paro by lunchtime and head to a very local kitchen that serves southern Bhutanese cuisine. They serve mainly curries and flatbread, with the occasional dhal baht. After a visit to the beautiful Rinpung Dzong that overlooks Paro. Dinner tonight is at our hotel, and a bit of rest before the big hike to Tiger's Nest the following day.

### Day 11 • PARO

This is the most difficult hike of the trip. The Tigers Nest monastery is located at an elevation of 2,950m and sits 800m high above the Paro valley floor. This hike is an uphill climb most of the way with a teahouse stop about half-way up the hill.

What makes it difficult is the altitude and the extra twist at the end when you finally reach the lookout at Tigers Nest. At this vantage point the temple is just across the ravine, yet the path descends downwards once more before climbing back up again to access the temple entrance. It's an additional hour of stairs.

Our tour itinerary is very gentle, and hence you will be properly adjusted to the altitude and in good shape to tackle Tigers Nest with minimal effects of elevation. It is a challenge, but very achievable.

The Tigers Nest monastery is synonymous with Bhutan and is also the most celebrated cultural landmark here in Bhutan. This is also one of the most holiest of places associated with Guru Rinpoche, the patron saint of Bhutan.

We have an alternate plan for those who decide the hike uphill, or the wear and tear on the knees coming back downhill, are simply not their idea of fun. A short drive out of Paro is a modest temple called Eutok Gompa. Young novices here are from some of the poorest families in Bhutan, and were it not for this temple they would struggle to afford an education. We can join these young children for lunch and bring a few additional supplies to brighten the menu.

### Day 12

#### DEPARTURE

We depart Paro with the option to fly to Kathmandu (for travellers heading back to Europe) or direct flights to Bangkok (for those connecting through to Australia).



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## TOUR INCLUSIONS

- Bhutan visa processing/visa fees
- Accommodation at 3 star hotels on twin sharing basis (single supplement available at additional cost at time of booking)
- Airport transfers in Bhutan
- Government mandated sustainable development contribution (USD\$65/night/person)
- All meals (lunch, dinner and breakfast)
- Services of an experienced professional licensed tour/hiking/cooking guides
- Host from Be Your Best in addition to local guides
- Transport throughout the stay in Bhutan, sightseeing activities, museum/monument fees, road/monument permits
- Packaged drinking water throughout the stay in Bhutan and other services wherever possible.

## ACCOMMODATION

Bhutanese hotel standards are very good and the 3-star hotels we use are ones we visit every year and have had great experiences with. All rooms are clean and of a standard you would expect for international travellers, with private ensuite and daily servicing.

You can expect to have access to electricity every night and a chance to recharge camera batteries, phones and ipads, plus access to complimentary wifi. Hotels are well heated and hot showers are a standard amenity at any time of year.

## SPICY vs BLAND

There was a time when Bhutan was infamous for “tourist food”, which was bland and uninspiring, in a misguided attempt to protect travellers from the spicy chillies that locals enjoy so much. We’ve been running trips to Bhutan for over a decade and our guides understand that our travellers really enjoy trying as much of the genuine Bhutanese food as possible.

The thing to remember is that the Bhutanese tolerance for chillies is very different to our own. If you don’t like the heat of chilli at all, then this trip may not be the right trip for you.

Some meals will be served at the hotels we stay at, but mostly we make special arrangements to enjoy local eats that are especially tasty or culturally interesting. Usually both. There will typically be a range of options at each meal during this trip, but if you have special dietary requirement or allergies please let us know in advance.



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## WEATHER

July is a warm time to be in Bhutan. The rice will be green and tall and the sunshine can be very hot indeed. It should be generally very dry and not too humid. When we visit temples it is expected to dress respectfully, which means covering up the shoulders and knees. Long sleeves and a collar are advised, and head covering is not permitted. The Bhutanese will dress in traditional Kira and Gho, regardless how warm the weather, when visiting a temple or Dzong.

## FLIGHTS

The itinerary starts with a Be Your Best host collecting you from Bhutan's Paro Airport on Day 1 and heading out on tour from the airport pick up. Please talk with us to help you choose a flight that arrives with the rest of the group into Paro airport. Coming from Australia a flight via Bangkok is the best option. Bhutan's national carrier, Druk Air, and Bhutan Airlines both provide flights via Kathmandu and Bangkok. Upgrading to business class on these sectors is very modest in price and can make your transit through Bangkok Airport a little easier.

## SIM CARD

For those who need to be contactable at all times, it's easy for us to arrange a local SIM card for your time in Bhutan. This must be done while in Thimphu and costs less than US\$25 inclusive of several gigabytes of 4G data. Just make sure you bring an unlocked phone if planning to use a local card. International roaming can be hit and miss.

## TIPPING

Tips for local trekking guides and driver are included in tour price so tipping is not necessary.

## FOR THE KIDS

Did you know Bhutan has a special system for western travellers that allocates a portion of your daily travel budget to an government fund that covers the cost of education for Bhutanese children. Every day you stay in Bhutan you are helping advance schooling for local kids.

## TRAVEL IN BHUTAN

All travellers visiting Bhutan must book through a registered tour operator in Bhutan or its international agent – that's us! Each Bhutanese registered tour operator is monitored by the Tourism Council of Bhutan to ensure they meet stringent requirements and provide guests with high quality service. We've been working with our team in Bhutan for over a decade now and we know they will do their very best to make your visit to Bhutan the best it can be.



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## HEALTH & HAPPINESS

The itinerary is designed around attending the Summer Festival in Ha Valley, the very best foodie event in the Bhutanese calendar. The rest of the adventure is a blend of gourmet indulgence, remote wilderness and cultural immersion. It's a gentle journey taken at a slow pace that allows time to soak in the culture and enjoy the Himalayas.

One of the reasons Bhutan is the happiest place on earth is because they take life at a sensible pace. They don't try to do too much. We have a similar philosophy for our tour designs. A gentle pace means a better tour experience, and a chance to fully appreciate what a sensational and inspiring destination Bhutan truly is.

There are some short walks included on the itinerary, because so many of Bhutan's loveliest temples are located deep in the forests. But there are no full day treks, or the need to carry a pack lunch for this itinerary.

The toughest walk in this itinerary will be Tigers Nest. Not only does the hike rise nearly a kilometre in elevation from the trail head, but the final section is a dip back down into a ravine before ascending stairs into the temple itself. We have all day for the hike if we need it, there's no rush.

For many of us the walk back down from Tigers nest is actually more demanding than the climb to the top. It's tough on the knees especially. If you are susceptible to knee trouble then hiking poles for this section are advised.

Before we reach Tigers Nest you'll have lots of opportunity to warm up for the climb. The itinerary starts easy and builds in difficulty over the journey, along with acclimating to the elevation. The itinerary is very achievable and immensely enjoyable.

For those who decide this hike is simply not their thing, we have an alternate day out planned to visit a special temple where the least privileged young children are given an education and spiritual guidance.

This is not a healthy detox trip filled with meditations and mantras. It's a chance to connect with the daily lives of the Bhutanese, to see how they live and how they cook, and embrace the Himalayan diet. There's a good reason Bhutan is famous for their attention to happiness. Maybe this will make you healthier, but that's merely a side effect of living your life well.



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## IS ALTITUDE A PROBLEM?

Absolutely not!

But it's always wise to ask first. We've been running trips in the Himalayas for over a decade now and we understand why many people are worried about the elevations.

This itinerary avoids any seriously tough elevations, and we take it slowly on the journey so your body can adjust to the conditions. By the time we tackle the Tigers Nest you will be very well acclimated and ready to give it your best.

There are times during this trip when you will feel a little breathless, and some the high passes we travel through are in excess of 3,300m, but we have never had a guest suffer from "altitude sickness" on our Bhutan or Nepal adventures.

We'll do our best to help you keep hydrated and to stay within your limits. If you are taking medication for a heart condition, a lung condition or post-covid complications we ask that you consult with your doctor for advice on altitude and your condition.



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## COVID ASSURANCE

Due to the ongoing potential for Covid-19 to impact future travel plans, we are offering an assurance that in the event of our tour departure being cancelled due to border closures, you will be given the option to move to another date in future at no extra cost.

To secure your place on any scheduled departure a deposit is required. Travel Insurance remains essential for participation on our trips. It is essential to include covid-coverage with your insurance.

If you need assistance in organising suitable coverage for your travels, please get in touch so we can help.

## WHO ARE BE YOUR BEST TOURS

Be Your Best is a very small operation that focuses on finely crafted travel experiences. Ewen Bell and Shellie Froidevaux started the business together so they could create a very small selection of the very best adventures. These trips are their absolute favourite experiences in the world. Nothing less than the best.

Shellie and Ewen have worked in travel for decades and during that time made friends all over the globe. Those friends are the tour guides on the Be Your Best adventures.

These itineraries are crafted by hand, the product of endless discussions, personal experiences and decades of running tours. Every trip offers something absolutely unique and many can only be run once a year.

**No itinerary is ever the same twice.**



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