

2nd Asia Ranger Congress 2026

Field Excursion — Site Visit Proposals · Bhutan

Field Excursion Guide

2nd Asia Ranger Congress · 2–4 December 2026 · Bhutan

Select one destination for your one-day field excursion. Each site has been chosen to showcase Bhutan's extraordinary natural heritage, conservation achievements, and the vital work of forest rangers across different ecosystems.

Five Extraordinary Destinations at a Glance

At a Glance — Five Extraordinary Destinations

ROYAL BOTANICAL PARK

- 30 km from Thimphu
- ~1 hour drive
- Red Panda habitat
- Bhutan's 1st Botanical Park

Difficulty: Easy

Biological Corridor
Conservation Site

PHAJODING TRAIL HIKE

- Starts in Thimphu
- 3,650 m altitude
- 7–8 km one way
- 3–4 hrs ascent
- 13th-century monastery

Difficulty: Moderate

Spiritual + Nature
Heritage Hike

ROYAL TAKIN PRESERVE

- 5 km from Thimphu
- 10–15 min by road
- National Animal site
- Pine forest enclosure
- Valley viewpoints

Difficulty: Easy

Wildlife Conservation
Cultural Heritage

TIGER'S NEST HIKE (PARO)

- 60 km from Thimphu
- 3,120 m altitude
- 2–3 hrs ascent
- 8th-century sacred site
- Himalayan biodiversity

Difficulty: Moderate+

Iconic Pilgrimage
Biodiversity Hotspot

GIDAKOM FOREST (FMU)

- Mewang Gewog
- 13,101 ha managed
- Blue pine dominant
- 266 households
- 92%+ timber compliance

Difficulty: Easy–Moderate

Sustainable Forestry
Community Livelihood



SITE 1 · Royal Botanical Park, Lamperi



Royal Botanical Park, Lamperi — Where rhododendrons paint the Himalayan forest floor

□ Royal Botanical Park — Key Facts

30

km from Thimphu
~1 hour drive

46+

Rhododendron
Species

5+

Wildlife Species
inc. Red Panda

2

National Parks
connected corridor

Easy

Difficulty
All fitness levels

Dec–Mar

Best Season
Clear skies

Wildlife you may encounter:

□ Red Panda □ Sambar Deer □ Himalayan Black Bear □ Leopard Cat □ Monal Pheasant □ Blood Pheasant

Overview

Nestled along the scenic Thimphu–Punakha highway near Dochula Pass, the Royal Botanical Park at Lamperi is Bhutan's first botanical park; a jewel of temperate forest just 30 km from the capital. Spread across a mosaic of oak, birch, fir, and magnolia, the park serves as a living library of Himalayan plant life and a critical biological corridor linking two of Bhutan's most important national parks.

For rangers and conservationists attending the Congress, Lamperi offers a rare opportunity to walk through one of Asia's most intact temperate ecosystems, witnessing firsthand the conservation outcomes that sustained protection and community stewardship can achieve.

What Makes This Site Exceptional

- Bhutan's most comprehensive rhododendron collection, nearly all of the country's species represented in one park
- Critical biological corridor connecting Jigme Singye Wangchuck NP and Jigme Dorji NP
- Habitat for flagship species: red panda, Himalayan black bear, sambar deer, and leopard cat

Distance

30 km from Thimphu

Travel Time

~1 hour by road

Difficulty

Easy — suitable for all

Elevation

~2,600 m asl

Highlights

Rhododendrons, Red Panda habitat, walking trails, misty forest views

Corridor

Links 2 National Parks

Best Season

Oct–March (clear skies, accessible trails)

- Rich orchid, fern, and magnolia communities alongside well-maintained walking trails
- Outstanding viewpoints offering panoramas toward Dochula Pass and the Himalayan range

"Walking through Lamperi is walking through the heart of Bhutan's botanical heritage — every tree, every bloom speaks of a commitment to conservation that spans generations."

SITE 2 · Phajoding Monastery Trail — Day Hike



Phajoding Monastery Trail — A 13th-century sanctuary rising above the Thimphu valley

Phajoding Trail — Hike Profile

3,650 m above sea level Monastery altitude	7–8 km one way distance	3–4 h ascent time	13th C Founded by Lama Drogon Chogyal Phagpa	Moderate Difficulty Good fitness needed	Panoramic Valley Views + Himalayan range
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Trail highlights:

 Blue Pine Forests  Himalayan Panoramas  Ancient Monastery Complex  Prayer Flag Ridges  Monal Sightings  Meditative Solitude

Overview

Few hikes in the Himalayas combine the spiritual, the scenic, and the ecological as seamlessly as the trail to Phajoding Monastery. Rising from the upper streets of Motithang in Thimphu to a 13th-century monastery complex at 3,650 metres, this 7–8 km trail is a microcosm of Bhutan's unique relationship between its people, its faith, and its forests.

For rangers and conservationists, the trail is a vivid demonstration of how sacred landscapes serve as de facto protected areas. The blue

-  **Trailhead**
Motithang, Thimphu
-  **Duration**
3–4 hrs ascent; full day
-  **Distance**
7–8 km one way
-  **Top Altitude**

pine forests, prayer flag-lined ridges, and pristine mountain environment owe much of their integrity to the reverence local communities hold for this ancient site.

The Hike Experience

- Trail begins at Motithang, one of the most accessible alpine hikes from any Asian capital city
- Passes through dense blue pine forest rich with birdlife including monal pheasant and thrushes
- Prayer flag-covered ridges offer dramatic panoramas of the Thimphu valley below
- The monastery complex, founded by Lama Drogon Chogyal Phagpa, includes multiple retreat cabins and meditation cells
- On clear December days, stunning views of high Himalayan peaks including into Tibet
- The descent reveals how altitude zonation shapes forest composition — an outstanding ecological transect

3,650 m asl

 **Difficulty**

Moderate — steady climb

 **Founded**

13th century

 **Ecosystem**

Blue pine, sub-alpine meadow, rocky ridge

 **Birdlife**

Monal, Blood Pheasant, Himalayan thrushes

"The Phajoding trail is living proof that faith and forests make the strongest conservation alliance — centuries of reverence have preserved what modern policy alone could not."



SITE 3 · Royal Takin Preserve, Motithang



Royal Takin Preserve — Meet Bhutan's mythical national animal in its forested sanctuary

□ Royal Takin Preserve — Quick Facts

5 km

from city centre
10–15 min drive

Takin

Budorcas taxicolor
National Animal of Bhutan

Sacred

Created by Divine
Madman Drukpa Kunley

Pine

Forest Enclosure
Natural habitat setting

Easy

Difficulty level
Family-friendly

Top-rated

Thimphu attraction
year-round visit

Experience at the preserve:

□ Takin herds in forest □ Pine forest walks □ Thimphu valley panoramas □ Conservation education □ Cultural legend □ Native birdlife

Overview

Just 5 km from central Thimphu, the Royal Takin Preserve offers one of the most intimate wildlife encounters available anywhere in the Himalayas. This sanctuary exists because of Bhutan's remarkable relationship with its national animal, the takin (*Budorcas taxicolor whitei*), a creature so unusual in appearance that legend credits its creation to the 15th-century saint, the Divine Madman Lama Drukpa Kunley.

The preserve's origin story is itself a conservation lesson: when gifted takins were released into the wild, they repeatedly returned to human settlements rather than the forest. The decision to create a protected forested enclosure rather than keep them confined represents an early and instinctive model of community-centred conservation.

Why Rangers Will Find This Inspiring

- Direct, close-range observation of Bhutan's national animal in a natural pine forest setting
- A compelling case study in human-wildlife coexistence and adaptive conservation management
- The preserve's cultural dimension; takin mythology, royal gifting traditions, illustrates how spiritual values underpin conservation in Bhutan
- Panoramic viewpoints over the Thimphu valley provide context for understanding urban-forest interface challenges
- Short, accessible format makes this ideal for mixed groups and those with limited mobility

Location

Motithang, Thimphu

Travel Time

10–15 min from city

Distance

5 km from the centre

Species

Takin (*Budorcas taxicolor whitei*)

Difficulty

Easy — flat terrain

Views

Thimphu valley panoramas

Habitat

Natural pine forest enclosure

Ideal for

All ages, family-friendly

"The takin is Bhutan in a single animal — mythical, resilient, and found nowhere else on Earth. To see one in the forest is to understand why Bhutan places conservation at the heart of its national identity."



SITE 4 · Tiger's Nest Hike — Paro Taktsang



Paro Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) — Bhutan's most iconic spiritual and biodiversity landmark

▣ Tiger's Nest (Paro Taktsang) — Facts & Figures

3,120 m

monastery altitude

60 km

from Thimphu
~2 hrs by road

8th Century

Guru Rinpoche's
sacred meditation cave

2–3 h

ascent time

Moderate+

Difficulty
Rewarding for all

World-class

Biodiversity
Conservation site

Biodiversity you'll encounter:

▣ Himalayan Monal ▣ Musk Deer ▣ Blood Pheasant ▣ Leopard Cat ▣ Oak-Rhododendron-Fir Forest ▣ Watershed Protection Zone

Overview

Some places define a nation. Paro Taktsang, the Tiger's Nest, is Bhutan's most iconic landmark, most revered pilgrimage site, and one of the world's most breathtaking architectural achievements. Perched on a sheer cliff at 3,120 metres above sea level, the monastery appears to defy gravity itself, clinging to the rockface above the Paro valley.

Built around the cave where Guru Rinpoche meditated in the 8th century, arriving, according to legend, riding a tigress, Taktsang is simultaneously a supreme act of human determination and a testament to Bhutan's extraordinary natural setting. For rangers attending the Congress, the hike offers something beyond the spiritual: a deep dive into one of the most biodiverse forest corridors in the eastern Himalayas.

Conservation Significance

- The surrounding forest is a high conservation value zone supporting Himalayan monal, blood pheasant, musk deer, barking deer, and occasionally leopard cat
- Intact oak-rhododendron-fir-pine habitat forming a critical watershed protection zone for the Paro Chhu river system

Location

Upper Paro Valley

Distance

60 km from Thimphu

Road Time

~1.5–2 hrs drive

Altitude

3,120 m asl

Hike

~4 km to monastery

Ascent

2–3 hrs up

Difficulty

Moderate-Challenging

Sacred Since

8th century CE

Ecosystem

High conservation value forest

- Centuries of cultural reverence for the sacred site have delivered what ranger patrols alone could not: near-pristine ecosystem preservation
- The trail itself is a perfect ecological transect from sub-tropical pine through temperate broadleaf to sub-alpine zones
- An outstanding example of the Bhutanese model: where spiritual sanctuary and protected area management converge

Monumental Fee: Nu.1000/Person (To be born by individual participant)

"To stand before Tiger's Nest is to understand in an instant why Bhutan chose a different path — where the sacred and the natural are not separate, but one and the same."



SITE 5 · Gidakom Forest Management Unit (FMU)



Gidakom Forest Management Unit — Sustainable forestry in action across 13,101 ha of Himalayan forest

□ Gidakom FMU — Forest Management at Scale

13,101

Hectares managed
Under scientific plan since 1992

51%

Blue Pine coverage
Dominant forest type

266

Households
9 villages supported

92%+

Timber compliance
Rural + commercial supply

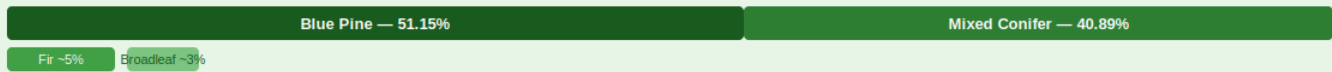
4 types

Forest types
Pine-Conifer-Fir-Broadleaf

37.62

ha reforested
3rd plan period

Forest type breakdown:



Overview

For rangers and forest professionals seeking a hands-on, technical field experience, Gidakom Forest Management Unit (FMU) offers an unparalleled window into Bhutan's scientific approach to sustainable forest management. Covering 13,101 hectares in Mewang Gewog, Thimphu Dzongkhag, Gidakom has been under active scientific management since 1992, making it one of Bhutan's longest-running and most data-rich forest management case studies.

The FMU demonstrates how Bhutan balances ecological integrity with community livelihood, timber production, and conservation. With 266 households across nine villages depending on the forest, including a Tibetan community of 47 households, Gidakom is a living model of multi-stakeholder forest governance.

Learning Outcomes for Congress Participants

- Scientific compartmentalization and management planning across 4 major forest types: Blue Pine (51%), Mixed Conifer (41%), Fir, and Broadleaf
- Practical demonstration of production, non-production, and protection management circles
- Timber volume compliance tracking, 92%+ achievement against permissible volumes, a model of transparent resource accounting
- Reforestation and forest road construction: 37.62 ha replanted, 6.24 km of forest road constructed in the 3rd management plan period
- Community forest governance model, including equitable distribution of rural timber to local households
- Climate record integration in forest management decisions (temperature range: -4°C to 27°C)

Location

Mewang Gewog, Thimphu Dzongkhag

Total Area

13,101.25 Hectares

Distance

26 km from Thimphu

Road Time

~50 min-1hr drive

Altitude

2,280 m – 4,878 m asl

Forest Types

Blue Pine, Mixed Conifer, Fir, Broadleaf

Communities

266 households / 9 villages

Plan Start

1992 — 1st scientific plan

Timber Supply

56,709 m³ — 92%+ of target

Reforestation

37.62 ha planted (3rd plan)

Difficulty

Easy

"Gidakom is what sustainable forestry looks like when science, community, and commitment align over decades. Every hectare here tells the story of rangers who chose stewardship over short-term gain."

Choose Your Field Excursion

Each site offers a unique lens on Bhutan's conservation story. Indicate your first and second preferences on your registration form.

Field trips are scheduled for 4 December 2026 · Full-day excursion with lunch, refreshment & transport provided