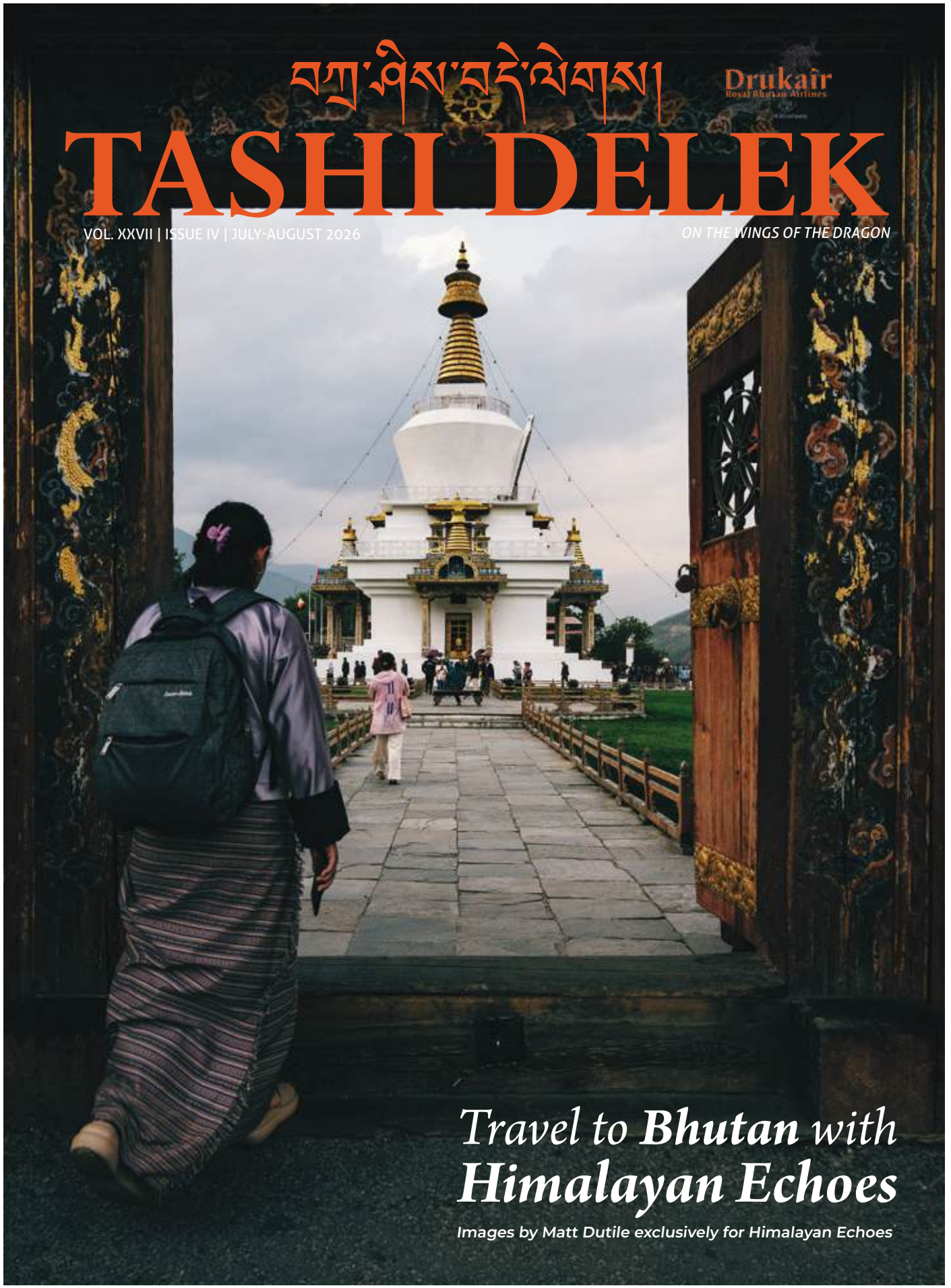


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TASHI DELEK

VOL. XXVII | ISSUE IV | JULY-AUGUST 2026

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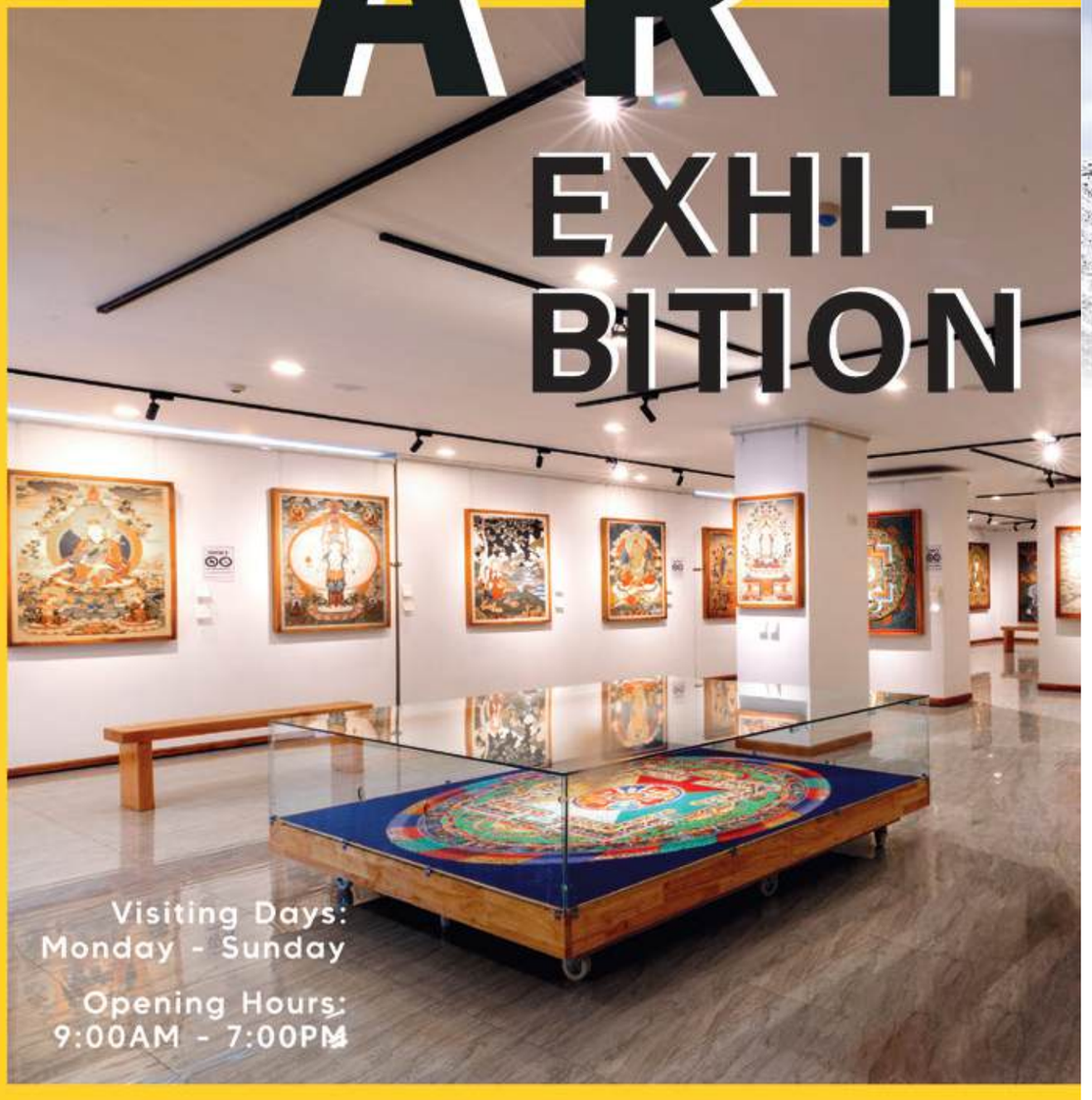
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10X JOURNEY

DHI's 10X Roadmap sets a bold vision to grow tenfold by 2035, aligned with the Gelephu Mindfulness City and Bhutan's 21st Century Economic Roadmap. DHI is transitioning from an asset steward to a strategic architect of Bhutan's future economy, driven by three pillars: portfolio management, investments in five priority sectors, and an innovation strategy that strengthens R&D, advanced technology, and entrepreneurship through the Multichannel Innovation Fund (MCIF).

Supported by robust financing, technology transformation, and human capital development, the 10X Roadmap positions DHI and Group to unlock long-term national growth and global opportunities.

Our Mission

To safeguard and enhance national wealth for all generations of Bhutanese through prudent investments.

Get in touch with us

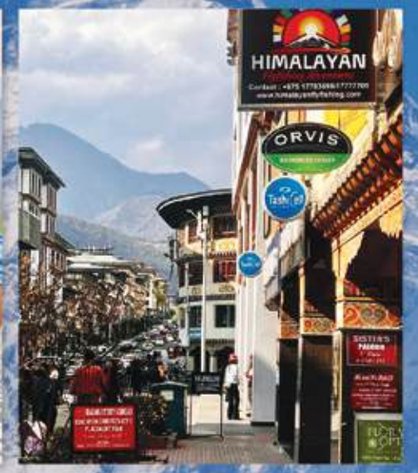
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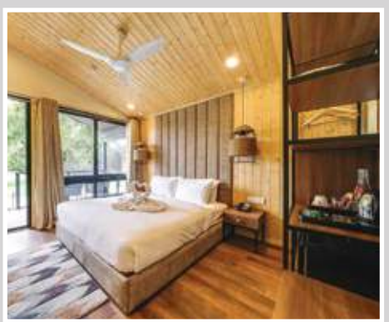





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Dear Passengers,



Tandi Wangchuk
Chief Executive Officer
Drukair Corporation Ltd.

As the national flag carrier of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, takes great pride in connecting our nation with the world while carrying forward the values, culture, and hospitality that define Bhutan. Every journey we operate is more than a flight - it is an opportunity to showcase the spirit of our country and create meaningful connections between people, places, and experiences.

As we enter the July-August travel season, we are encouraged by the sustained growth in travel demand and the increasing interest in Bhutan as a destination renowned for its rich cultural heritage, pristine environment, and unique development philosophy. This momentum presents exciting opportunities for both our tourism industry and our nation, and Drukair remains committed to supporting this growth through safe, reliable, and customer-focused services.

Over the past months, we have continued to strengthen our operations and enhance the travel experience through service improvements, digital initiatives, and new customer offerings designed to make every journey more seamless and enjoyable. These efforts reflect our unwavering commitment to excellence and our dedication to meeting the evolving expectations of our passengers.

Guided by Bhutan's values and the principles of Gross National Happiness, we strive to balance connectivity and growth with responsible environmental stewardship, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of our country.

On behalf of the entire Drukair family, I would like to thank our passengers, partners, and stakeholders for their continued trust and support. We remain dedicated to serving as Bhutan's gateway to the world and delivering journeys that are safe, comfortable, and memorable.

I wish you a pleasant flight and an enriching journey ahead.

Tashi Delek!

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TASHI DELEK

Tashi Delek is an auspicious and versatile Bhutanese expression. It is a word or an expression encompassing a number of meanings such as wishing you well, good wishes, congratulations, may many good things come to you, cheers, and good luck.

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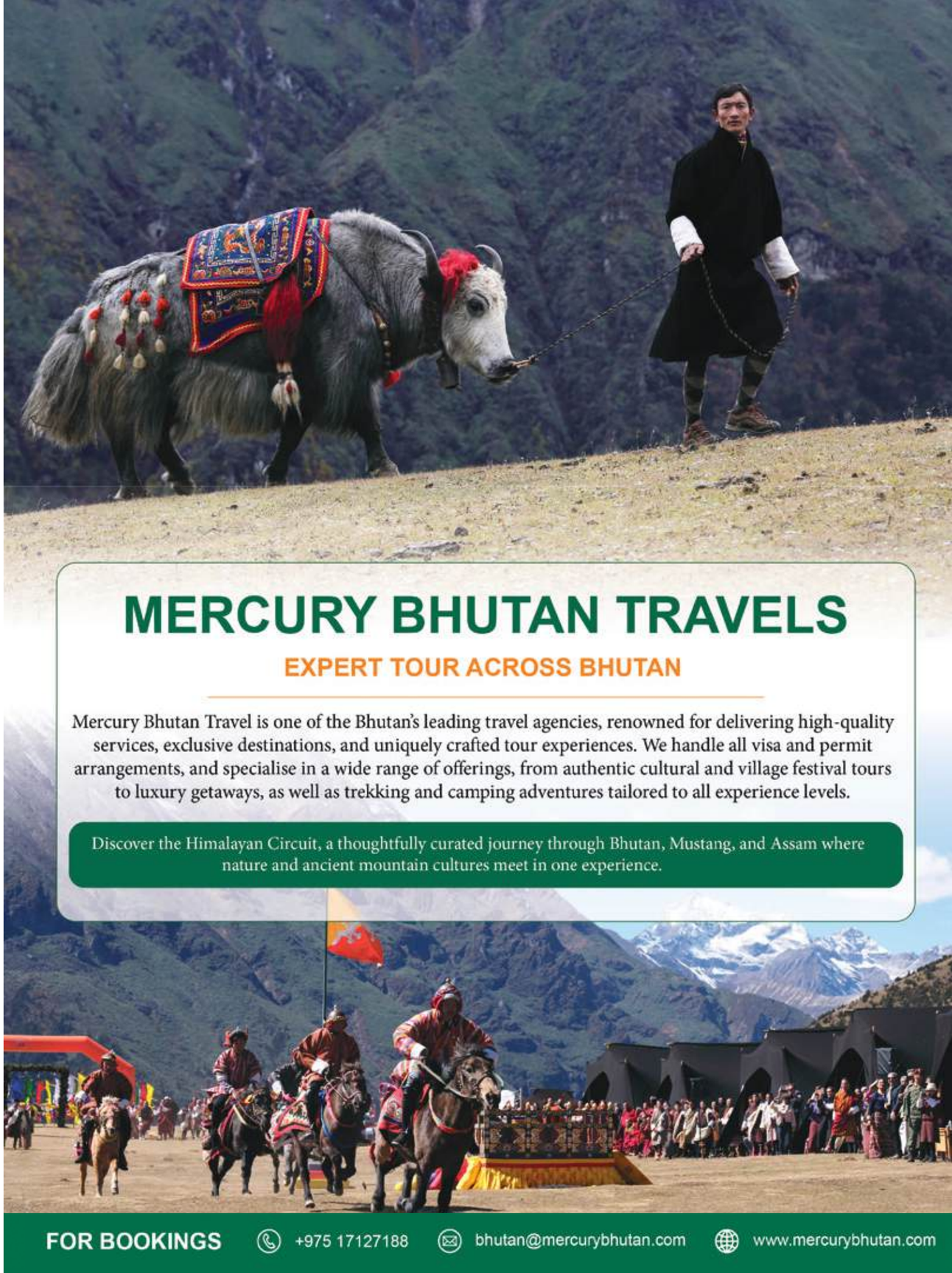
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FACTS ABOUT **BHUTAN**





NATIONAL FLAG

The National Flag is divided diagonally into two equal halves. The upper yellow half signifies the secular power and authority of the King while the lower saffron-orange symbolizes the practice of religion and the power of Buddhism, manifested in the tradition of Drukpa Kagyu. The dragon signifies the name and the purity of the country while the jewels in its claws stand for wealth and perfection of the country.



NATIONAL EMBLEM

The National Emblem of Bhutan is a circle that projects a double diamond thunderbolt placed above the lotus. There is a jewel on all sides with two dragons on vertical sides. The thunderbolts represent the harmony between secular and religious power while the lotus symbolizes purity. The jewel signifies the sovereign power while the two dragons (male and female) represent the name of the country Drukyul or the Land of the Dragon.



NATIONAL FLOWER

The National Flower is the Blue Poppy (*Meconopsis Gakyidiana)*. It is a delicate purple or blue tinged with purple blossom with distinctly concave petals. This species grows at an elevation of 3700-4300 meters above sea level. *Gakyidiana* is an epithet based on the Dzongkha word for happiness, *gakyid*, to reflect Bhutan's important cultural aspiration of 'Gross National Happiness' and *diana* is nomenclature term for the flower.



NATIONAL DRESS

Men wear the Gho, a knee-length robe that is tied at the waist by a traditional belt known as Kera. Women wear the Kira, a long, ankle-length dress accompanied by a light outer jacket known as a Tego with an inner layer known as a Wonju.



NATIONAL GAME

Archery was declared as the national game in 1971 when Bhutan became a member of the United Nations. Bhutan also maintains an Olympic archery team. Archery is played during public holidays in Bhutan and local festivals.



NATIONAL BIRD

The National Bird is the Raven (*Corvus corax)*. The Raven adorns the Royal Crown. The raven represents the deity Gonpo Jarodongchen (raven headed Mahakala), one of the chief guardian deities of Bhutan.



NATIONAL TREE

The National Tree is the Cypress (*Cupressus torolusa*). Cypresses are found in abundance and one may notice large cypresses near temples and monasteries. This tree is found in temperate climate zone, between 1800 and 3500 meters.



NATIONAL ANIMAL

The National Animal is the Takin (*Burdorcas taxicolor*) and is associated with religious history and mythology. It is a rare mammal with a thick neck and short muscular legs. It lives in groups and is found above 4000 meters on the north-western and far north eastern parts of the country.



CLIMATE SEASON

Bhutan has four seasons. Spring from March until April followed by Summer with occasional showers until late September. Autumn follows until late November, characterized by sunny days. Winter until March, with snowfall in regions above 3,000 meters.



NATIONAL AIRLINE

Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, is the National flag carrier of Bhutan. Drukair was founded on April 5, 1981 under the Royal Charter by His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Drukair plays a vital role in promoting Bhutan as a tourist destination and plays an important role in connecting Bhutan to the world.



CARBON STATUS

Bhutan is the first carbon negative country in the world, absorbing six million tons of carbon every year. The Constitution of Bhutan places a high premium on conservation of its natural environment, mandating the country to maintain at least 60 percent of its land under forest cover for all times to come.



DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

Promulgated by His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Gross National Happiness guides all development process in Bhutan. The central objective of GNH is to ensure a holistic and sustainable development by balancing the material and the non-material values.

THE LAST VAJRAYANA KINGDOM ESTABLISHES THE FIRST MODERN BUDDHIST CITY

A DHARMA KING OF THE 21ST CENTURY AT THE HELM

In the international scenario, the word "Buddhist" evokes an image of peace and calm. Sometimes the images are prayers flags, temples, monks in meditation. There is also the sight of nineteen monks walking across the United States for peace, much appreciated by the US public. It resonates across cultures and faiths because peace is a common aspiration.

This image of serenity carries a fundamental message of Buddhism. Yet Buddhism is much more than calmness, simplicity, and serenity. It has taken root in some of the harshest terrains on earth, and across the rugged Himalayas. It has outlasted empires and invasions, and been adopted by prosperous nations, warrior kingdoms, and peasant societies over more than two thousand years of human history.

Buddhists are not all monks. They were Kings who governed vast territories, merchants and fishermen, hunters and householders, and artisans sometimes considered "low caste". Buddhism is egalitarian, unaffected by the caste system. For example, a celebrated Brahmin scholar who became the abbot of Nalanda, the greatest Buddhist university of the ancient world, had as his teacher a woman who made arrows for a living.

In the 2,600 years since Gautama Buddha, a Buddhist





figure who is celebrated to this day is the Dharma King. Dharma Kings have been profoundly influential in the spread of Buddhism worldwide. They are not Buddhist leaders in a conventional sense. They are secular visionaries who placed the full weight of sovereign power in the service of the Dharma, using statecraft, diplomacy, and sometimes force to create the conditions in which the Buddha's teachings could flourish across entire civilisations. Without these rulers, Buddhism might have remained a forest tradition. Instead, it became a dynamic cultural and spiritual force that has spanned and shaped civilisations.

Dharma Kings

The schools and lineages of Buddhism - Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana and all their branches - are not simply cultural heritage. They are living transmission systems carrying the Buddha's wisdom forward through time. That wisdom is vast, with thousands of instructions to cultivate compassion, to understand the nature of reality, to practise in different situations, different teachings designed for people of different views. Buddhists understand that the Buddha taught not one path, but many, because different beings have different needs, inclinations, and capacities. The different schools of Buddhism are channels through which those teachings remain accessible, and Dharma Kings have always played an important role in protecting these traditions. Dharma Kings are leaders whose vision extends beyond personal legacy. They seek to protect their lands and people, and above all, to preserve the wisdom and teachings of the Buddha.

King Ashoka of the Mauryan Empire began as a ruthless conqueror whose armies devastated the kingdom of Kalinga. The remorse he felt afterward was so profound that it changed the direction of his reign entirely. He converted to Buddhism, renounced further military expansion, and spent the rest of his rule erecting pillars and edicts inscribed with Buddhist principles across his empire, sending emissaries as far as Sri Lanka, building hospitals for people and animals.

King Kanishka of the Kushan Empire convened the Fourth Buddhist Council, patronised the Gandharan art that produced the first human representations of the Buddha, and oversaw a period in which Buddhism became a genuinely cosmopolitan religion along the Silk Road.

Emperor Wu of Liang took the Bodhisattva vows, a formal commitment to work for the liberation of all beings rather than oneself alone, prohibited the execution of criminals and the sacrifice of animals, and built hundreds of temples and monasteries across China.

For the context of this story, we look at Songtsen Gampo, a Dharma King of Tibet who established

Buddhist civilisation across the Himalayan world. Among his legacies, the best known is his building of 108 temples across the Himalayan region. According to traditional accounts, his bride-to-be - Princess Wencheng - conducted a geomantic survey and discovered that the entire Tibetan landmass lay on a supine demoness, whose heart lay at the lake of Othang in Lhasa, her limbs stretching to distant territories, breeding savagery and diabolic forces across the landscape. To subdue the demoness and make the land fit for the Dharma, temples would need to be raised on her vital points to pin her to the earth. The Jokhang Temple was built on her heart. Twelve more temples followed on her shoulders, hips, elbows, knees, hands, and feet.

History has recorded 108 temples in the Buddhist realm, across the Himalayas, 13 of them outside Tibet. Two of them were built in Bhutan. Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang was built on the left knee of the demoness and Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro was built on her left foot. Both are still live places of worship, among the most sacred sites in the country, and Bhutan's known history effectively begins with their founding.

It is believed that these temples were constructed simultaneously, as part of a single coordinated effort to bind the landscape. The network of temples Songtsen Gampo planted became one of the earliest and most geographically ambitious sacred infrastructure projects in Asian history, anchoring Buddhism across vast mountain terrain and creating a shared sacred landscape that connected Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, and the border regions into a unified spiritual world. Many of those temples have stood and functioned without interruption for nearly 1,400 years.

These rulers are remembered not for their power but for what they chose to do with it. They ruled with the Dharma as their compass, and they created the conditions in which the Buddha's teachings could reach people who would otherwise never have encountered them. When scholars and Buddhists speak of Dharma Kings, they speak of these historical figures, studied and venerated in retrospect.

Protecting the Dharma

Dharma Kings emerge during critical moments in the history of Buddhism. Over the eons, human behaviour creates periods when spirituality declines and, as we have seen, the dharma is revived. Going by the trends of yet another generational transition, such a time has come. Buddhist masters have described the current loss of spirituality and a resulting moral turbulence as degenerate times. Thus the need for spiritual revival.

The Wangchuck dynasty of Bhutan has built a legacy on value traditions inspired by Buddhism. It is the essence of the Bhutanese identity which evolved through the centuries and was adapted by each generation for its era. The priorities for human development are peace and happiness, interpreted as environmental, cultural, economic, and political conditions. These values do not change but adhere with the times. A powerful example is Gross National Happiness, coined by Drukgyal Zhipa at a time when the world was overwhelmed by materialism.

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck embodies a vision that places the Dharma King in contemporary times. His is the story of a Dharma King building a Buddhist capital for the 21st century. The Gelephu Mindfulness City is Special Administrative Region (SAR) where ancient Buddhist traditions are already taking roots.

The GMC's master plan, designed by the Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), is "carbon negative, karmic positive", as one visiting Stanford professor described it. Rather than reshaping the land, the city grows on natural terrain, merging with the landscape and its waterways. Gelephu takes the uniqueness of Bhutan forward, this time carefully engineered with cutting-edge technology - modern living spaces side by side with sacred structures.

Initial public concern in Bhutan was that Bhutanese presence would be totally dwarfed by international investors and projects. But GMC has taken off on a sacred foundation with 23 iconic nyes (spiritual sites) and many more have received kashos (Royal approval) from His Majesty The King.



Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro



Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang



Gelephu Chorten is modeled on the Jarun Khasor Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal

Bhutan is the last sovereign Vajrayana Buddhist Kingdom. Having preserved its heritage intact in a rapidly changing world, it has been described, somewhat idealistically, as the last bastion of Vajrayana Buddhism. While this may have a feel of romanticism, Bhutan is, indeed, a custodian of ancient lineages and practices. GMC is a progressive interpretation of Bhutanese traditions. His Majesty has declared it a Buddhist city. Besides being a potential home to centres from every major Buddhist tradition: Theravada, Mahayana, Zen … there will be institutions (including a university) for monastics and lay practitioners, research centres, retreat spaces, and forums for dialogue between contemplative traditions and modern science.

For Himalayan Buddhists, Gelephu is also an auspicious start to the eighth century sacred trail which Guru Rinpoche blazed, crossing the subtropical border in Sarpang, climbing through the dense forests to Trongsa, and then to Bumthang, now a spiritual heartland. Known as the Lotus Born Trail, adventurous pilgrims will follow the path of the Lotus-born Guru who is believed to have tamed local spirits along the way and sowed the seeds of Vajrayana civilisation and thus the Bhutanese identity.

This is a Buddhist pilgrimage destination like no other. Important Buddhist nyes like Lumbini, where Buddha was born, Bodhgaya, where he achieved enlightenment, Sarnath, where he gave his first sermon, and Kushinagar, where he died and was cremated, draw Buddhist pilgrims from every tradition. GMC represents a testimonial of the past, being Guru Rinpoche's entry into Bhutan; the present, with the vibrant spiritual culture that brings pilgrims to Bhutan; and the future, as a modern nucleus of the Buddhist world.

108 Chortens

February 21 to 25, 2026, was an amazing week at GMC, with all of Bhutan being involved in body and spirit, and with people around the world watching.

On the 46th birth anniversary of His Majesty The King, His Holiness the Je Khenpo and the Dratshang (Bhutan's Central Monastic Body) consecrated the first spiritual landmark of GMC, the Ugyen Norlha Chorten. Housing the sacred shrine of Ugyen Norlha, the wealth manifestation of Guru Rinpoche, the chorten embodies



the transformation and prosperity of the GMC.

On the same day, Bhutanese from every corner of the country and from around the world attended the ground-breaking ceremony of the Gelephu Chorten, another icon of Buddhist history. His Majesty The King, together with His Majesty Drukgyal Zhipa, His Royal Highness the Gyalsey, and His Holiness the Je Khenpo buried sacred treasure vases as the spiritual foundation for the construction the chorten. The Gelephu Chorten is a direct connection of the Wangchuck dynasty to the history of the Jarung Khashor Lhakhang that precedes even the historic Gautama Buddha.

These are two of 23 momentous spiritual sites at various stages of planning and construction in GMC, each one with a sacred story of its own. They are initiated by Rinpoches and Trulkus, planned by GMC professionals, designed by architects, and funded by devotees around the world. They are supported with zhabto, the Bhutanese practice of voluntary labour for common good. Zhabto is a tradition of nation-building, alive and thriving today - no Bhutanese citizen and friends of Bhutan want to be left out. This is how the Bhutanese populace is involved in the emergence of the GMC, building the King's vision into reality.

On February 21, 2026, His Majesty announced another portentous mission. Bhutan will build 108 chortens, 100 metres apart, each 15 metres tall, between dawn and dusk on a single day. Blending ancient designs with modern construction techniques, in a country of fewer than 800,000 people, tens of thousands of Bhutanese will bring together two thousand years of Buddhist tradition with contemporary methods, brick by brick.



The number 108 is auspicious in Buddhist tradition, symbolising completeness. Eminent lamas and monks will preside over the consecration of the stupas. The 108 chortens symbolizes a living tradition, embedding blessings, protection, and peace before the city rises around them, establishing their influence for generations. The closest recorded human event is Songtsen Gampo's pan-Himalayan undertaking of 108 temples raised simultaneously across the region, transforming the Himalayas into a sacred land, radiating protective energy.

Of Dharma Kings

Emperors and Kings charted the course of humanity with vision, power, and dynamism, often with armies of soldiers and slaves. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is creating history, replacing force with technology and creativity. GMC is His Majesty's legacy, a centre for all of Buddhism, and a validation that spiritual values and economic vitality can share the same ground.

Judaism has Jerusalem. Islam has Mecca and Medina. Christianity has Rome and Constantinople. These are cities where the sacred and the everyday coexisted, where pilgrims and merchants, believers and non-believers, residents and visitors existed as cohesive communities. The Buddhist world had its great cities like Shravasti, a prosperous commercial center where the Buddha taught most of his sermons. Vaishali was another center for trade and industry, with suburbs like Vanijyagrama, the merchant village. Nalanda drew monks and scholars from across Asia, with thousands of students and teachers. Kapilavastu, the Buddha's childhood home, sat on trade routes near the Himalayas. While we revere these great places of worship, they were also thriving centers of trade, learning, and daily life.

As Dharma Kings of the past nurtured in ancient cities, the Buddhist university, research centres, retreat facilities, and spaces for interfaith dialogue in GMC will draw practitioners and thinkers from across the Buddhist world. The Dharma Kings of history were visionary not because they preserved what existed but because they carried the tradition into territory it had never reached before, giving it new forms, new institutions, new geographies.

Bhutan is a peaceful nation because of its Dharma Kings. That peace is genuine, but it has never been passive. This nationwide commitment to help build a Special Administrative Region from the ground up, is enabled by the power of compassion. This 21st century urban habitat, with the Dharma at the centre, is something the world has not yet seen. His Majesty is doing what needs to be done for Bhutan's future and for the Buddhadharma.

Today, even as Buddhism has picked up sporadically in other parts of the world, through practices like mindful meditation and promoted as mindful living, it is losing ground in the eastern home of the practice. Buddhism is the only major world religion to have declined in absolute numbers in recent decades. Between 2010 and 2020 alone, the global Buddhist population dropped by nearly twenty million. Across Asia, younger generations are losing touch with their own traditions. Modernisation has come with the misconception that old ways belong to an older world. Practices and teachings that sustained communities for centuries can seem, through a modern lens, like relics of a simpler time, meaningful perhaps to grandparents but not obviously relevant to a life lived with a smartphone and a career.

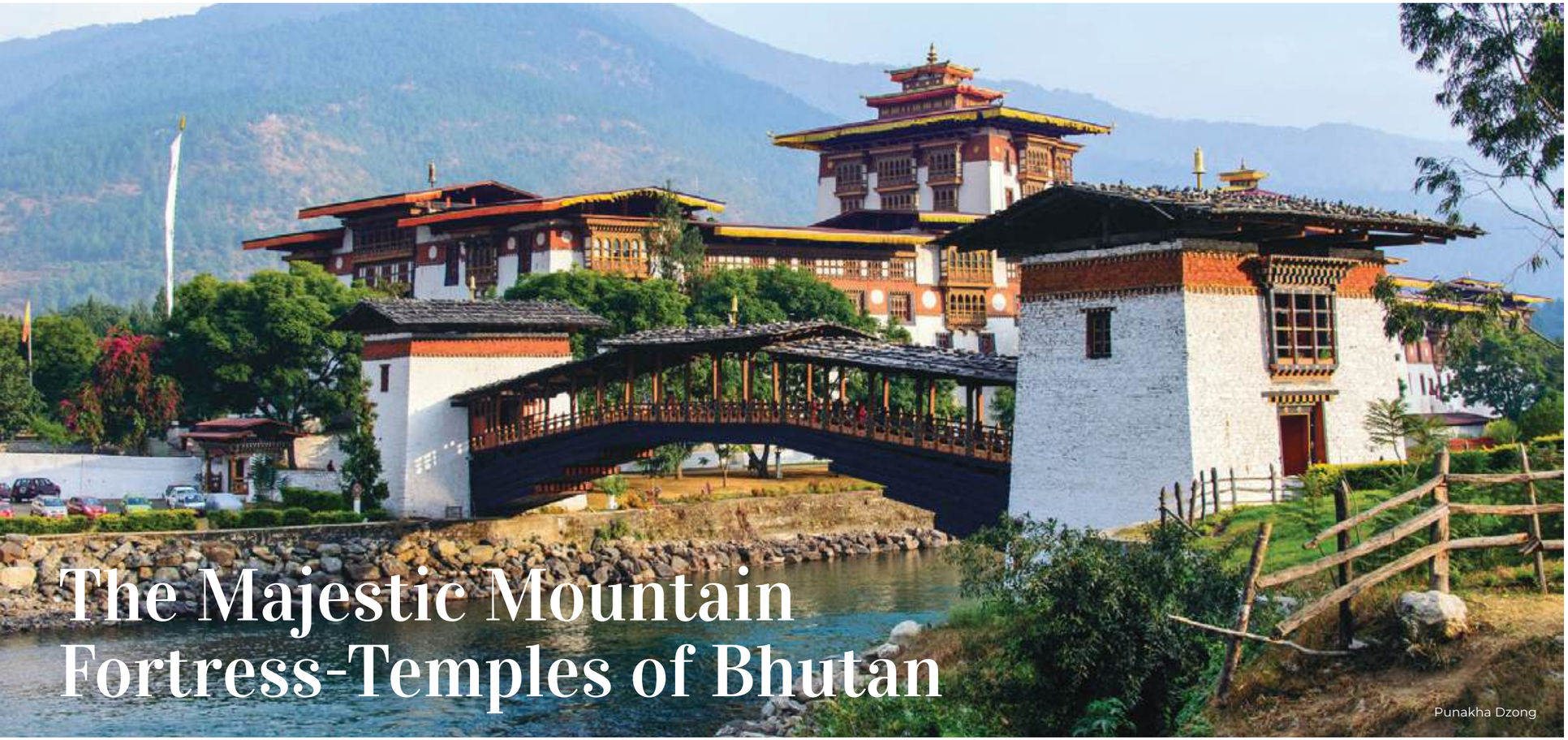
Bhutan is one country where Buddhism is celebrated as a spiritual practice that is relevant for all times, validated by the human experience and by science. GMC is where this unique vision is becoming a reality: monasteries of every Buddhist tradition; monumental chortens that are living landmarks; a Buddhist university open to monastics and lay practitioners alike; research centres; forums for dialogue between contemplative traditions and modern science. They will thrive side by side with modern practices of agritech, aviation and logistics, green energy, health and wellness, financial services and digital assets, wealth management.

GMC is Bhutan in the 21st century.



DASHO KINLEY DORJI

He is, by education and interest, a journalist.



The Majestic Mountain Fortress-Temples of Bhutan

Punakha Dzong

Many travelers to Bhutan feel they are about to encounter something entirely unique even before they land at Paro International airport. As one flies into Bhutanese airspace, far below on its mountain tops, are perched large white, red-roofed structures with stunning golden steeples. Their brilliant white walls stand drenched in the sun, in stark contrast to oceans of deep forest green that surround them. For these are the famous dzongs of Bhutan.

Dzongs, usually standing atop mountains or mountainous ridges, are large temple-fortresses found across Bhutan at important strategic and visually stunning sites. They continue to capture the imaginations of contemporary travelers in terms of their majestic beauty and near-impossible existence. One can only imagine what the astonishing delight of the first foreign travelers when they first encountered these formidable structures made almost completely by hand, in an era before mechanized construction, or modern roads, communication or travel.

Historical, Spiritual and Socio-cultural Significance of Dzongs

The first dzongs in Bhutan were constructed in the medieval period in the twelfth century by Buddhist leaders and clergies. The construction of these architectural wonders reached their pinnacle in the 17th century, under the leadership of Ngawang Namgyal, the first Zhabdrung Rinpoche, recognized as the unifier of Bhutan. It is said that Zhabdrung identified the site for each dzong for its strategic location, but also identifying its location through spiritual visions, prophecies, omens, and auspicious events.

Dzongs were always built on strategic mountain tops, with views extending kilometers into the distance. In this sense, they acted as important military defense fortresses that provided strategic watchtowers over its mountain passes, valley entrances and rivers of the high Himalayas, in a country that remained isolated to the outside world for centuries, save for carefully monitored trade, seasonal migration, religious pilgrimage and a limited number of diplomatic missions.

Apart for their military purpose, dzongs served a multitude of purposes, as that also acted as religious, administrative, cultural, and spiritual centers. In the past, the state and religion were inseparable, whereby dzongs played a central role in enabling the government to fulfill its religious and administrative mandates, as well as central locale for housing these respective branches of government. Dzongs, therefore, included government offices as well as Buddhist temples and housing for monks.

Although today in Bhutan, religion and the state are now separate, many dzongs continue to house monks and government administrative offices. They continue to act as the cultural heart of many districts, as they are the location where its famous annual *tsechus* [mask dance festivals] take place. Dzongs not only act as a "locale" or "space" but as social hubs for the festivals, bringing together hundreds if not thousands of Bhutanese festival attendees, who dress in their finest woven and embroidered traditional attire and jewelry reserved for important formal events, often handed down over the generations. The festivals are a time for meeting family and friends from neighboring villages and districts, to engage in lively social reunions, gatherings, functions and Buddhist ceremonies and rituals. They also draw large crowds of tourists from all over the world to witness this unique, colorful and festive cultural phenomenon.

Feats of Architecture and Engineering

Dzongs are considered architectural masterpieces and engineering wonders, given their unique style and multipurpose functioning, but also the incredible feats of engineering that were required to bring them into material reality. They are often built as a complex of fortified buildings, sometimes attached to one another (such as Trongsa dzong, as described below), or sometimes separated from one another (such as Paro dzong, as detailed below).

As mentioned above, dzongs were constructed at a time before mechanized construction, which make them a feat of engineering. The traditional structures were constructed using locally available materials, and did not use nails or iron bars. It is believed they were constructed without the use of any written architectural or structural plans. Rather, each individual dzong plan was conceptualized by Buddhist lamas, who conceived their features and dimensions through the interpretation of spiritual signs, symbols, events and visions.

Each dzong thus has its own history. At the same time, its history evolved over time, as it responded to changing historical periods and events, and adapted to changing social, cultural, religious and development epochs. Over time, each dzong was renovated, altered and expanded to varying degrees, or was rehabilitated or rebuilt due to damage caused by fires, earthquakes and floods. In this sense, it is living record and testament to different changes over time, which are inscribed into its each of its unique architecture, and its structural evolution.

Most dzongs are composed of a rectangular building made up of high fortifying walls made of stone and/or battered clay masonry that act as an enclosure for its flat stone inner courtyard and inner buildings, all of which rest on a

stone foundation. Within its inner courtyard is a towering structure that houses Buddhist shrines and elaborate altars dedicated to the Buddha, Buddhist masters and guardian deities, as well as auspicious religious statues, artefacts and relics. These inner buildings are constructed using wooden beams that are skillfully cut with precision to fit into each other dexterously.

Some dzongs have multiple towering structures, courtyards and inner buildings, sometimes nesting one into another, and built at different historical times and even different styles and materials. The interiors of the inner buildings often consist of an amazing array of elaborate wooden carvings, including beams, columns, doors, and colorfully painted ceiling and wall murals portraying rich in religious and historical detail. Prayer wheels are an important feature of many dzongs, such as the many that line the inner-courtyard of Tashichho Dzong in Thimphu. Perpetually turning on their axes with the helping hands of people, they release blessings and prayers into the universe with every turn of the prayer wheel.

The areas surrounding dzongs feature beautiful landscaping that includes age-old trees, rose gardens, flower gardens, and bridges for those dzongs that are located on rivers. These bridges themselves are important architecture features on major rivers that are strategic and auspicious in nature, such as Punakha dzong, located at the confluence of female and male river systems.

Significant Dzongs

It is estimated there are approximately 30 dzongs in Bhutan, with at least one in each of its twenty districts. Five of the dzongs of Bhutan are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the dzongs in Punakha, Paro, Trongsa, Dagana and Wangdue Phodrang, given their central importance in terms of the country's culture, history and identity. Here, I review four major dzongs, before turning to five other dzongs known for their unique features, interesting architecture and/or stunning locations.

Punakha Dzong – built in 1637, is considered one of the most picturesque dzongs because of its location on the confluence of two rivers, the Mo Chhu and Po Chhu. It is the second oldest and second largest dzong in the country, servings earlier as Bhutan's capital and seat of government capital until 1955 when it moved to Thimphu. It has three courtyards, and continues to act as the winter residence of the Central Monastic Body. During the spring months, the vivid lilac coloured jacaranda trees that adorn its outer landscape are in full bloom, providing stunning vistas of the dzong, set against the backdrop of the surrounding green mountains, hills and the two roaring rivers. The dzong is also important for its history, as it is the birthplace of the modern monarchy of Bhutan, with the enthronement of the First King of Bhutan in 1907. This is also where the royal coronation of the present Fifth King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck took place in 2008, followed by the Royal Wedding in 2011, both events drawing national and international attention, with the entire country celebrating the auspicious events.

Paro Dzong – built in 1646 and located on the banks of the Paro Chhu river, this formidable dzong can be viewed perched high on the mountainside as one lands at Paro International Airport, and what a welcoming sight it is. The dzong itself serves as the administrative offices of the local government in Paro district. Leading to the dzong is a wooden cantilever bridge. The watchtower towering in a separate building high above the dzong today serves as the National Museum of Bhutan. The museum houses Bhutanese art, artefacts, manuscripts and ancient Buddhist thangkas [religious scrolls]. During the spring of every year, the dzong hosts the popular Paro tsechu, drawing crowds from near and far.

Trongsa Dzong – built in 1647, it is built strategically along a route in the centrally located district of Trongsa, which once represented the only route between east and west of the country. The dzong is the largest in the country, and its striking white walls nestled among the dark green pine trees of the mountain ridge, can be spotted kilometers away, as one travels along the quietly winding national highway today. Historically, it played a significant role in controlling the Kingdom, given its strategic location, also located suspended high on a mountain ridge, overlooking the deep valley of the Mangde Chhu.

Tashichhodzong – originally built in 1216, the original building is located high above Thimphu. In 1641 onwards, new buildings were constructed at the current site, and it has since then expanded several times, as well as undergone reconstruction and restoration following an earthquake in 1897. It is located in the northern side of the Thimphu's capital city, on the banks of the Wang Chhu river. Parts of the dzong are dedicated to government administrative offices. One of its main towers houses a Buddhist shrine and altar, featuring a very tall statue of Buddha Shakyamuni and several deities, sheltering within a very tall room with columns rising far above to its intricately painted ceiling. Many ceremonies are performed in this altar room, and many dignitaries, diplomats and VIPs have visited this dzong for official events hosted by His Majesty the King of Bhutan.

Unique Dzongs

Among the many dzongs in Bhutan, I include only five here (there are many more), because of their unique features, but also to represent different geographical locations across the country. Almost all dzongs host annual tsechus [masked dance festivals], which draw large crowds of people in celebration within the country as well as from abroad. While the more visited Paro and Thimphu dzongs draw very large number of visitors, these smaller and unique dzongs may take a little more time to get to, but are worth the time and effort. One can appreciate these gems more genuinely and authentically, away from bigger tourist crowds.



Trongsa Dzong



Tashichhodzong



Wangdue Phodrang Dzong



Lingzhi Dzong

Gasa Dzong - built in the 17th century, it is located in the far north of the country. It features a tower that is uniquely round-shaped, rather than all other dzongs which have rectangular shaped towers. It houses sacred relics of cultural and religious importance, and sections of the dzong act as administrative office of the district of Gasa. Similar to Trongsa dzong, the formidable fortress can be spotted from kilometers away as one traverses the winding road through Jigme Wangchuck National park, given its location high on a mountain ledge. The dzong is surrounded by jagged white peak Himalayan mountains, with the roaring Mo Chhu river far below, which also houses the popular hot spring baths that are celebrated for curing ailments as well as a popular retreat for locals and tourists alike.

Wangdue Phodrang Dzong – originally built in 1638 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the unifier of Bhutan, it holds important cultural and strategic historical significance. It is located high on a mountain ridge overlooking the Punak Tsang Chhu and Dang Chhus rivers below, it offers picturesque views of the surrounding valleys. In 2012, the dzong was severely damaged by a fire, which damages most of its structure, interiors and many of its important religious objects. It has since then been carefully reconstructed using traditional methods to restore its original design.

Lhuentse Dzong – is a prominent dzong located in the Kuri Chhu Valley of Lhuentse district, with the Kuri Chhu river flowing nearby. Perched high on a mountain top at the end of a narrow valley, the dzong provides stunning views of its surroundings. It is of historic importance, because the forefather of the Wangchuck dynasty of Kings, Jigme Namgyal was born there in 1825. The dzong suffered damage from an earthquake in 2009, and was reconstructed in 2013.

Lingzhi Dzong – built between 1667 and 1680, it is also known as Lingzhi fortress, because it commemorates an important historical victory over Tibetan invasions. Located at approximately 4000 meters (13, 123 feet) above sea level in the northwestern region, the dzong was built on the top of a mountain surrounded by stunning valley landscapes. Adding to the stunning scenery of the dzong, the two white snow-capped mountain peaks of Jichu Drake and Tserim Gung can be seen northwest of it.

Tshenkharla Dzong (Trashiyangtse) – built in the 9th century, is one of the oldest dzongs in Bhutan. It is located on a mountain ridge past which the Dongdi Chhu rivers flow far beneath it. It is located in a quiet location, and this adds to its spiritual and mystical appeal, one that almost acts a bridge to the historical past. It also houses important Buddhist and historic relics.

Towards Mindful Travel

Every dzong in Bhutan has intricately colorful mural wall paintings. Among them is the famous painting of the "four friends". The four friends depict the story of an elephant, monkey, rabbit and bird, each of whom work together collaboratively, in cooperation and dependence on one another to reach the fruits of the tree far above them. Alone, none can reach the fruits. The story of the four friends signifies our interconnectedness towards one another, as human beings, and towards nature. The story not only reflects Bhutan's national and Buddhist values of generosity, kindness, compassion and respect for all sentient beings, it also encapsulates the country in a nutshell.

To travel to the wonder of environmentally and culturally rich Bhutan is a unique experience. It allows travelers to experience a country that places central importance on nature and culture, and its conservation and protection. The country is a rich haven for wildlife, birdlife and rich biodiversity, as well as spiritually rich Buddhist practices that promote harmony, balance, mindfulness and the importance protecting its history. The majestic and auspicious mountains of Bhutan and its majestic dzongs remain protected against the forces of modernity, as they should be. Foreign travelers too have a responsibility as travelers, pilgrims and tourists. We must tread carefully and gently, with great respect and compassion to the local environments, and its inhabitants, big and small, and its local cultural and spiritual practices steeped deep in history, philosophical meaning and mindfulness. These environmentally, culturally and historically important sites are not just "tourist destinations" but are central ways of life for people and other sentient beings that inhabit these precious spaces. We are mere visitors passing by, but also have the potential of being transformed by our travels and taking and disseminating our learnings when we go back home, while being careful not to impact or harm such fragile locales we visit in turn. As the famous saying goes, *take only memories, leave only footprints*. Bhutan provides both the traveler an unprecedented experience in a pristine environmentally, culturally and historically rich spiritual setting where the pace of life is slow and mindful – a gentle yet powerful reminder that we are all interconnected with one another, to nature and this amazing planet we share with all other sentient beings.



DR RITU VERMA

An anthropologist, researcher, author and photographer, she has published extensively on GNH, Bhutan, and beyond. She is a regular columnist in this magazine. Find her at rituvermapuri.wordpress.com, ucla.academia.edu/RituVerma and twitter.com/Rituvermapuri

Himalayan Echoes

Stories within

Images by Matt Dutile exclusively for Himalayan Echoes

Himalayan Echoes is a luxury tour operator offering transformative travel experiences across the Himalayas.

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Himalayan Echoes

Stories within

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The guardians of the Himalayas

Bhutan's greatest treasures are not in its museums. They are in the hands of the these artists who have kept alive the traditions and forms of Bhutanese art that are at least 300 years old.



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The weavers whose patterns carry lineage and not just design



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Through relationships built over many years, **Himalayan Echoes** opens doors to intimate experiences that most travellers walk past without knowing they exist.

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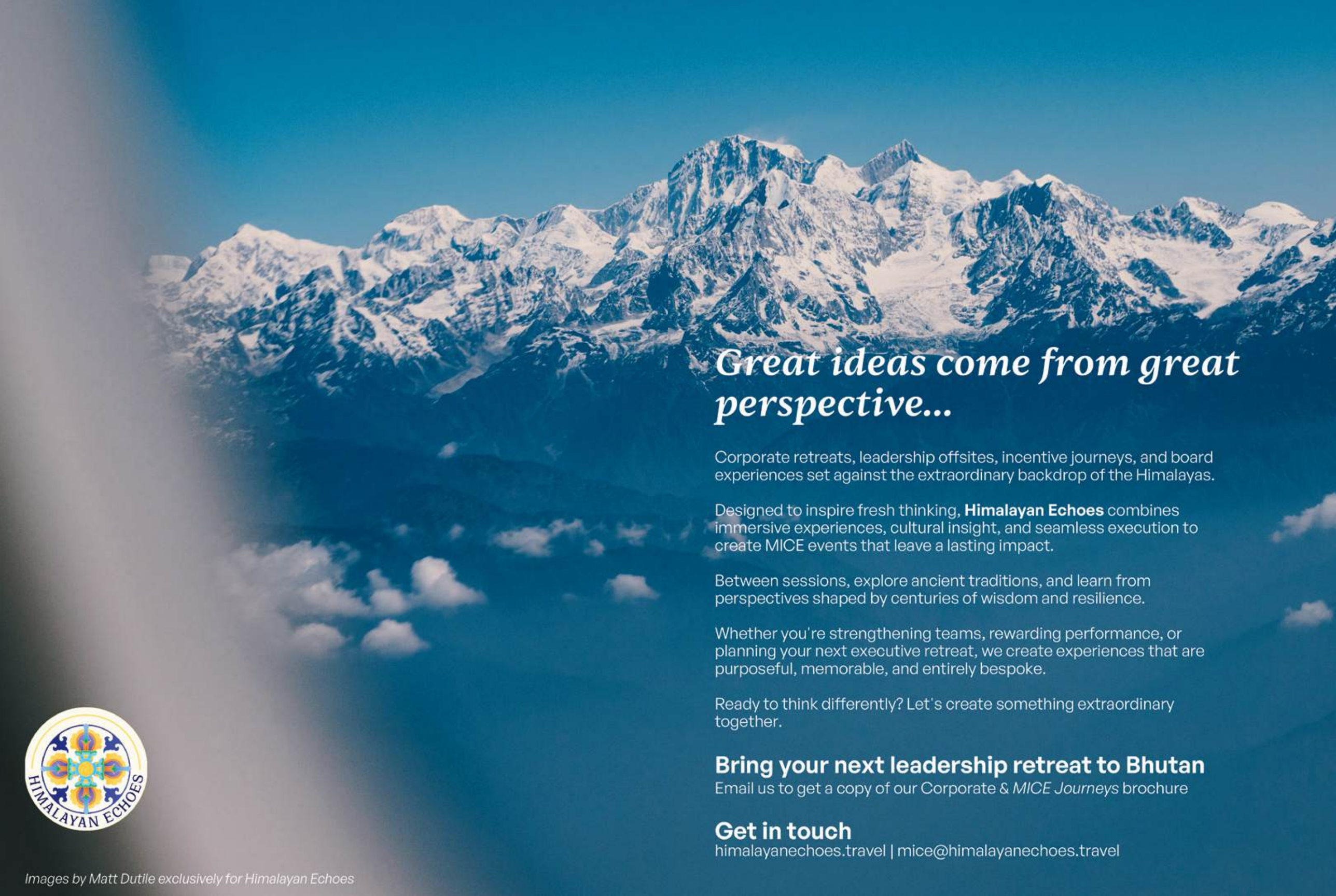
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The Art of Being Human

Bhutan Echoes: Drukyul's Literature and Arts Festival 2026

In a world transformed by artificial intelligence, digital innovation, and rapid technological change, Bhutan invites the world to pause and reflect on a timeless question: What does it mean to be human?

From 1–3 August 2026, the 15th edition of Bhutan Echoes: Drukyul's Literature and Arts Festival (DLAF) will bring together an exceptional gathering of writers, thinkers, artists, scholars, filmmakers, diplomats, and cultural leaders in the Himalayan capital of Thimphu.

This year's theme, "The Art of Being Human," explores how we preserve empathy, creativity, wisdom, culture, and meaningful human connection in an increasingly digital world. Through conversations on storytelling, education, leadership, language preservation, wellbeing, history, cinema, culture, and innovation, the festival seeks to examine the balance between progress and humanity.

Founded in 2010 by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Gyalyum Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Bhutan Echoes has grown into one of the region's most distinctive cultural platforms, bringing together Bhutanese and international voices in meaningful dialogue.

The 2026 programme features an outstanding lineup including Princess Aswati Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, Amish Tripathi, the Kamishibai Association, Murray Shanahan, Pawo Choyning Dorji, Portrait Bhutan and many other distinguished guests from Bhutan and around the world.

Set against the backdrop of Bhutan's rich cultural heritage and its globally admired philosophy of Gross National Happiness, DLAF 2026 offers a unique opportunity to explore the ideas, stories, and values that shape our shared future.

As the festival celebrates its landmark 15th edition, it continues its mission of fostering literature, culture, creativity, and dialogue, while reminding us that in an age of unprecedented change, our humanity remains our greatest strength.

Bhutan Echoes: *Drukyul's Literature and Arts Festival 2026*
1–3 August 2026 | Royal University of Bhutan, Thimphu
Theme: *The Art of Being Human*















exposure



Upasana Dahal

She is a passionate Bhutanese photographer and filmmaker. Holding a Master's in Mass Communication with Video Production, she has collaborated with international production houses globally. Inspired by her love for cameras, Upasana captures societal stories to inspire global audiences and empower more women to pursue filmmaking for a meaningful living.

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Oopztravel- tour company name



Upasana Dahal is a Bhutanese photographer, filmmaker, and travel consultant whose work is rooted in storytelling, cultural exploration, and meaningful human connection. Having collaborated with international organizations, brands, and production houses across the globe, she has built a career dedicated to capturing authentic narratives that transcend borders and resonate with diverse audiences.





Guided by her passion for visual storytelling, she uses photography and film to document the richness of communities, traditions, and everyday lives, bringing stories from remote corners of the world to a global stage.

Holding a Master's Degree in Mass Communication with a specialization in Video Production, Upasana combines technical expertise with a thoughtful creative vision. Through her work, she seeks to inspire curiosity, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the world, while encouraging more women to pursue filmmaking and share stories that contribute to a meaningful and inclusive society.

Beyond the lens, Upasana is a travel consultant specializing in bespoke, client-centered journeys that move beyond conventional tourism. Her carefully curated travel experiences are designed around each traveler's interests, whether focused on cultural immersion, wellness, adventure, creative exploration, or personal transformation. She believes that travel is most impactful when it fosters genuine connections with people, places, and local communities.

By seamlessly blending her expertise in photography, filmmaking, and travel design, Upasana creates immersive experiences that inspire discovery, authenticity, and personal growth. Her work reflects a commitment to storytelling with purpose—inviting others to explore the world with intention, embrace new perspectives, and create lasting memories along the way.

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Beyond the Classroom, Beyond Bhutan

Wings of Inspiration: Drukair's Tongsa Penlop Inspire Program







Dressed in matching orange T-shirts and black tracksuits, the students stood in neat rows at Paro International Airport, their boarding passes clutched like passports to a new life. For most of them, airports were places seen only in television and on social media clips shared by friends living in towns. But on that winter morning, the airport was real – its check-in counters, the rolling suitcases, the roar of engines somewhere beyond the runway.

They were 47 students (23 boys and 24 girls) drawn from 20 dzongkhags across Bhutan. Among them were three students with special needs, and alongside them seven teachers who looked equal parts proud and anxious, like parents on a first day of school.

Many students came from remote schools where the road ends in mud and the day begins with long walks across fields, suspension bridges, or mountain tracks. They were selected because they were academically strong, from disadvantaged backgrounds, and had never travelled abroad before.

The journey was part of the Tongsa Penlop Inspire Program (TPIP), an educational outreach initiative run by Drukair, Bhutan's national flag carrier, repurposed from the earlier Tongsa Penlop Rolling Trophy Annual Golf Tournament.

Conceived by its founder, Yab Dasho Dhondup Gyaltshen, the program was designed with an idea so simple it feels radical: that inspiration, when offered at the right moment, can permanently reshape a young person's horizon.

"An opportunity to travel abroad and to see the world differently will inspire less privileged students for life," Yab Dasho Dhondup Gyaltshen said.

TPIP had already been held successfully in 2018 and 2019. Its third edition, launched in December 2025, brought together students and teachers for a carefully designed itinerary that mixed cultural grounding at home with international exposure abroad. The program was not a luxury holiday dressed up as education. It was a deliberate attempt at confidence-building, an effort to tell students from the margins that the world, too, belongs to them.

Before Thailand, Bhutan

The program began even before the students boarded an international flight. The first group arrived in Paro on December 18, with others joining the next day. They were hosted at Druk Gyalpo's Institute, an environment that itself felt like a different universe to students from small village schools. There, they went through orientation sessions that included grooming and confidence-building sessions, travel etiquette briefings, and an introduction to how airports and airlines work – lessons that quietly signalled something bigger: that they were being prepared for the wider world, not merely visiting it.

On December 20, the students visited Dungkar Dzong for cultural reflection, a grounding moment that reminded them who they were even as their environment expanded. On December 21, they traveled to Thimphu, visiting Buddha Point, the Takin Preserve, and Changyul Park.

That evening, Drukair hosted a warm reception dinner that became, for many students, one of the most unforgettable moments of the entire journey. Each student was presented with a full set of travel merchandise, thoughtfully put together to ensure they lacked nothing on the trip.

The package was comprehensive: gho with lagey and kira with tego and wonju; formal shoes and sneakers; formal socks and two sets of casual socks; tracksuits; a thermal jacket; a suitcase for check-in luggage and a backpack for daily movement; T-shirts, half pant and cap; and a dedicated toiletry bag stocked with a complete kit – shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb and sunscreen – along with a bath towel.

The students also received their passports, ID card, baggage tag, and water bottles, details that may sound ordinary but carried extraordinary meaning for children who had never traveled beyond their districts, let alone across borders.

On December 22, they visited Paro International






Airport, not as travelers yet, but as learners, observing firsthand how Bhutan connects with the world through aviation.

"When the aeroplane took off…"

For one student, the first shock came even earlier, from a domestic flight.

Dawa Tshomo, a student of Tshekharla Central School, flew for the first time from Yonphula Domestic Airport. The moment the wheels left the runway, fear rose sharply inside her.

"When the aeroplane took off, I felt scared at first," she recalled. "But when I looked down and saw the mountains growing smaller, I realised how fortunate I was to get this opportunity."

It is hard to overstate what that view means to a child raised in the mountains. In villages where horizons are blocked by ridges, the world feels physically close, enclosed by geography. From the sky, the same mountains shrink into shapes. The mind does, too. It loosens. It begins to believe.

Another student, Jamyang Yoezer, captured the emotional weight of the experience in a single sentence. "I never even dreamt of flying on Drukair, let alone staying in a big city like Bangkok," he said. "This trip showed us there are no limits to what we can achieve if we study hard and believe in ourselves."

Bangkok: A new world

When the group arrived in Thailand later that evening, Bangkok did what big cities always do. It overwhelmed.

For students who measure distance in hours of walking and roads in hairpin bends, Bangkok was scale and speed made visible. Cars moved like rivers. Shopping malls looked like airports. Buildings rose into the sky as if they had no reason to stop. And at the centre of it all was their hotel – Grand Four Wings, a five-star property where the students stayed for five nights.

For Pema Samdrup, a Royal Academy student, the hotel experience was not simply about comfort. It was about access.

"I had never been inside a five-star hotel before," he said. "That night made me realise that such places are not only for rich people. If we work hard, we can reach there one day too."

Learning across borders

On December 23, the students travelled to Dhammajairine Wittaya School in Ratchaburi Province. There, they interacted with Thai students – sharing stories, observing classrooms, and discovering that education can look different while still serving the same purpose: to broaden life choices.

For Dawa Choden of Samtengang Higher Secondary School, the experience was deeply personal.

"We learnt about a different education system and saw how students are prepared for practical skills alongside academics," she said. "This opportunity has changed how I see my future. I will remember this trip for the rest of my life."

A teacher escorting the students from eastern Bhutan noticed a particular spark in them as they encountered technology abroad. Dorji Phub said the children were fascinated by the digital gadgets and equipment they saw – items that many already knew existed, but had rarely touched or seen in abundance.

"With access to similar facilities," he said, "Bhutanese students "can also learn quickly and gain hands-on experience".



Seeing the sea for the first time

On December 24, the students visited Khao Kheow Zoo and then Pattaya Beach. The day offered two kinds of wonder: nature's diversity and the ocean's immensity. For children raised among mountains, the sea feels like a myth made physical.

Karma Yuden said the trip allowed her to learn beyond textbooks. "We have read about oceans in our textbooks, but seeing the oceans with our own eyes was unbelievable," she said.

The interaction with Thai students, she added, inspired her to study harder. "It made me realise that with similar educational facilities, Bhutanese students could perform even better."

The program was curated to ensure an empowering and enjoyable experience for them.

Dream World amusement park on December 25 gave the students their first taste of a theme park: rides, lights, laughter and joy.

Ocean World on December 26 extended that wonder into marine ecosystems, sparking curiosity and awareness. The day also included a lunch hosted by the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in Thailand, and later, interactions with Trongsa Penlop scholarship students.

Even the shopping trip, a Bangkok rite of passage, had meaning. For students who rarely enter urban stores, a mall is not merely commerce, it is exposure, a sense of how the modern world functions.

Coming home, changed

On December 27, the participants returned to Bhutan. But they did not return the same.

"They didn't just return with photos. They returned with confidence, curiosity, and dreams that are now much bigger than before," observed an escort teacher. According to Drukair, the program's impact is reflected in students' confidence, aspirations, and educational motivation, extending well beyond the trip itself. In fact, testimonials from earlier participants suggest a lasting effect. Two past participants from 2019, now working professionals, said the program inspired them to work harder and pursue their goals.

Why it matters

In Bhutan, conversations about inequality often focus on infrastructure – roads, internet, schools, facilities. Those matter. But there is another inequality, harder to measure: the inequality of exposure.

Some children grow up seeing airports, meeting professionals, hearing about universities abroad, imagining careers beyond their districts.

Others grow up never meeting anyone who has traveled internationally, never seeing the sea, never understanding how big "big" can be. For those children, the world narrows not because they lack talent, but because they lack reference points.

TPIP addresses that gap directly. It tells underprivileged students that their starting point does not have to define their destination. It also normalises diversity, bringing together students from different dzongkhags, including those with special needs, and placing them in environments where difference is not just included, but celebrated.

Beneficiaries were selected jointly by the Office of the Gyalpoi Zimpon (Kidu Office) and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD). The selection process prioritized students who were academically strong but came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and who had no prior experience of international travel.

Drukair sees TPIP as aligned with its broader CSR goals – youth empowerment, inclusive development, and nation-building beyond commercial aviation. In this way, Drukair becomes more than a carrier of passengers. It becomes a carrier of possibility.

The most valuable souvenir

At the farewell event, the students were recognized with certifications. Partners, including the Office of Gyalpo Zimpon, the MoESD, and Druk Gyalpo's Institute and media partner - BBS, were honored for support. Dawa at Hilltop hosted the closing dinner.

But the most valuable souvenir was invisible.

It was the moment Dawa Tshomo looked down and saw the mountains grow smaller. It was the moment Karma Uden saw the sea and realised textbooks were only the beginning. It was the moment Pema Samdrup walked into a luxury hotel and understood that ambition is not reserved for the wealthy.

For 47 students who once thought the world ended at the edge of their valley, TPIP offered a rare and powerful message: the world is wide, and they, too, have a place in it.

Inspiring Future Together

Drukair invites you to partner with us for Tongsa Penlop Inspire Program, creating meaningful, long-term educational opportunities that make positive impacts in the lives of many. To amplify your support, Drukair will match every contribution, dollar for dollar, effectively doubling the impact of your generosity.

Your vital role as a sponsor will be highlighted through a professionally documented journey, produced in partnership with Bhutan Broadcasting Service, serving as a lasting testament to your commitment. We warmly welcome you to be part of this transformative program. To learn more or make a contribution, please contact us at tpip@drukair.com.bt.

WHAT THIRTY YEARS IN BHUTAN HAVE TAUGHT ME







Okay, the truth is it's been 29 and a half years since I moved here, but thirty is a good round number and it sounds better and it's more dramatic and six months will go really fast, so here we are. I came as a lone American and have expanded to a husband and a beautiful daughter, and so I'm looking back and maybe a little forward but mostly I am sitting, grounded in the present, enjoying every second. That's what Bhutan has taught me.

His Majesty the King of Bhutan thinks in five-hundred-year increments. I've been here thirty years and I'm still working on thinking past next Tuesday. But Bhutan has taught me things I couldn't have learned anywhere else, and I am a different and, most people I know argue, a better person for it. Here is some of what I know.

Laugh at yourself instead of getting mad at other people.

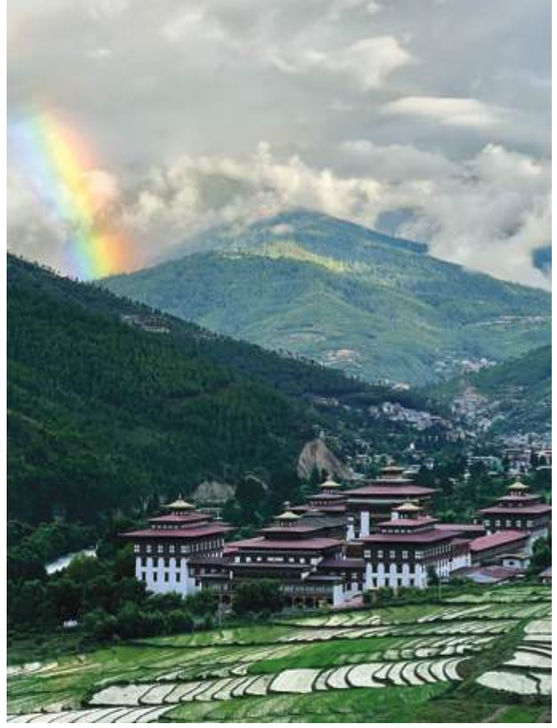
This sounds obvious. It's not. And it's harder than it looks, like walking backwards up a hill, especially in these times when everything in the world seems like it's on fire. It is anger inducing, and anger can be proactive, but too much anger just feeds itself and makes us miserable. In the West we are encouraged from birth to assert ourselves, defend our positions, stake our claim, and win. Bhutanese people have a completely different relationship with being wrong, being awkward, being human. They laugh. Not cruelly. Generously. At themselves first. Humility is one of their better traits and you will see it and feel it if you spend any time at all here. I have been laughing at myself in Bhutan for many years. I've even made money from it, which is not particularly Bhutanese. The release is immediate, the friendships that follow are real, and laughing is simply good for the soul.

If you don't do it in this life, relax. You can do it in the next one.

Bhutan is shaped by two ancient traditions, Bon, a nature-worshipping practice older than recorded history, and Buddhism, and they sit together here in easy companionship. One thing they agree on is that this life is not your only one, unless of course you choose not to reincarnate. Drukpa Kuenley, Bhutan's beloved patron saint, did exactly that. The Bhutanese relationship with time is consequently very different from ours. Deadlines are fluid. Urgency is negotiable. And somehow, beautifully, things get done. Almost everyone who visits Bhutan is encouraged to make the pilgrimage to Taktsang, the Tiger's Nest Monastery in Paro. It's a steep but manageable climb and the payoff is immense. The temples, the views, and the general vibe are incredible and no one is unhappy they made the effort. One of my good Bhutanese friends, someone who has been a friend and advisor for many years and a good Buddhist, told me once that he had never made the trip. I was surprised.









"Maybe in the next life," he said and smiled. That's where I got the idea.

I made my first pilgrimage to Taktsang in 1994, the day after I got off the plane, which tells you everything you need to know about my guide, who was ill advised at best. I was not remotely acclimated to the altitude. I had also managed to leave my beautiful Scarpa hiking boots at the Connaught Hotel in New Delhi, so we stopped on the way and found some ill-fitting Chinese army boots that were the only option available. At that time there was no proper path up to the monastery. You simply hopped from boulder to giant boulder, up and up, in boots that didn't fit, at an altitude your body had not yet accepted. Coming down I had the distinct feeling that I could fly. That I was, in fact, flying. I mentioned this to a doctor friend afterward and he said it was almost certainly altitude sickness and that I was, in his medical opinion, damn lucky to have survived. In the next life I will keep better track of my Scarpa boots. And find a better guide.

Rituals matter.

Every morning in my kitchen in Thimphu I boil and filter our water. My husband Namgay says we should just put a filter on the tap, something that is now, after many years here, actually a possibility. I dig my heels in and say no. It takes fifteen minutes. I do it every day. It grounds me in a way I cannot fully explain, but let me try: it has become a ritual, and rituals are the things that keep us human and alive and mindful. Mostly they keep us mindful. Bhutan runs on ritual: daily prayers, butter lamps lit at dawn, walking around a mani wall reciting mantras, festivals that mark the turning of the seasons. These are not decorations or superstitions. They are the architecture of a life.

Live with Less.

Bhutan has a way of quietly relieving you of things you didn't know you could live without. So in truth living with less is sort of a forced march. There's just less stuff here and there are not that many choices. There is no fast food, so you cook everything from scratch and it slows you down in the best possible way. Power outages happen. Water shortages happen. You learn to be creative and patient at the same time, which turns out to be a very useful combination. My life here is more basic than any life I could have lived in America and it is also, not coincidentally, better. I own less. I want less (for the most part). I definitely waste less. I worry less about the things that don't matter and more about the things that do, which are so few in number that it is striking. A bowl of nice soup. Clean water. A warm room. The sound of my husband moving around in the kitchen in the morning and then the smell of coffee. Bhutan has a word, *tubay*, which means "enough" Enough is contentment, one of the highest states a person can achieve. Not happiness exactly. Contentment. Enough. I am working on it every day and I am getting closer.

Look for magic. It's everywhere.

I mean this literally. In Bhutan the sacred and the everyday occupy the same space without apology. A raven, Bhutan's national bird and a trickster deity, lands on your windowsill and looks at you with what can only be described as amusement. He looks like he has met you before. A monk walks past a construction site chanting. He is wearing a large-brimmed turquoise garden hat you accidentally left at Cheri Monastery the year before. He looks really good in it. Prayer flags snap in the wind above a roadblock and people get out of their cars with loads of picnic baskets and a veritable feast ensues in the middle of nowhere. There is plenty of food for everybody.

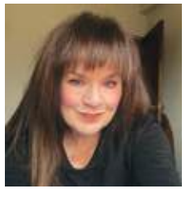
Years ago on a Sunday afternoon we all looked up above the SAARC building in Thimphu and there was a raging forest fire. Everyone stopped their cars and ran up the hill with blankets and rice sacks and started beating out the fire. As they looked around everyone noticed the Fourth King, called the Great Fourth, there amongst them, beating the fire with a shovel. A few minutes later an unseasonal, torrential downpour put the fire out. All true stories. Open your eyes. Magic is not hiding. It's right there in the open.

Bhutan was never colonized. Very little has historically come in or gone out. Its people are the product of an unbroken culture, confident and generous and constitutionally, stubbornly, magnificently chill. They are fun-loving and compassionate and they have absolutely no patience for neurosis. Bhutan takes the piss out of neurotic people. Ask me how I know this. The place is too beautiful and too full of things that actually matter. You cannot stay neurotic here for long.

I came here in 1994. I married a Bhutanese man. I boil my water every morning. I laugh at myself every day. I am less stressed about less important things.

Also, I have fewer wrinkles. That's sort of magical.

Bhutan is the most remarkable place you will ever visit. Open your heart and your mind, and take what you learn here and go live the rest of your life with this knowledge. Remember it on the difficult days especially, when the world is loud and the news is bad and nothing seems to be going right. Remember your feeling of peace and release and spread it around. The world could use a little of what Bhutan has. We all could.



LINDA LEAMING

She is the author of the best sellers, MARRIED TO BHUTAN and A FIELD GUIDE TO HAPPINESS. Her third book about Bhutan, NO RIGHT ANGLES, is forthcoming. She lives in Thimphu with her husband, Phurba Namgay, a painter.





FROM SERVICE TO SELF-RELIANCE

THE IMPACT OF DE-SUUNG AND THE DE-SUUNG SKILLING PROGRAMME

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, it didn't just pause life but shattered routines, dreams, and livelihoods in an instant. For Dema Lham, a young Bhutanese woman whose world revolved around the vibrant hum of the tourism industry, the sudden silence was overwhelming. The bustling streets emptied, the laughter of travelers faded, and the heartbeat of her work was replaced by stillness. Overnight, the life she had built was suspended in uncertainty, leaving her to grapple with loss of income and an aching void of purpose.

Before the pandemic, Dema worked alongside her elder brother in their travel agency, welcoming visitors eager to discover Bhutan's beauty. Tourism was thriving, and the future seemed secure. But when borders closed, bookings vanished, and life slowed to a halt, she was forced to search for hope in uncertainty. In that silence, she began to look inward, believing that even in disruption, renewal was possible.

It was in this moment that Dema felt a stronger call within her, a call to serve. In June 2020, she joined the De-suung Training Programme, stepping forward not just as a volunteer, but as someone seeking purpose through service.

Established on 14 February 2011 under the visionary leadership of His Majesty the King, De-suung, meaning "Guardians of Peace", was founded to inspire volunteerism, civic responsibility, and service among Bhutanese citizens. It became a platform for unity, discipline, and compassion, enabling individuals like Dema to serve the nation in times of need.





From its humble beginning with 125 volunteers, De-suung has grown into a nationwide movement with over 55,000 trained De-suups. Guided by the motto "Serving with Pride, Protecting with Compassion," they have become a trusted force in disaster response, community service, and national development.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, De-suups played a critical role in supporting quarantine facilities, assisting health teams, safeguarding public welfare, and ensuring national resilience. Yet their contribution extended far beyond the crisis.

In the years that followed, De-suups engaged in national service projects across Bhutan. They supported clean drinking water initiatives, irrigation systems, road construction, fruit tree plantation, and animal welfare programmes such as the National Dog Population Management initiative and many others. They also assisted border security alongside the Armed Forces and contributed to the construction and preservation of temples and dzongs.

Through these efforts, De-suups proved they were not only protectors in crisis but also builders of the nation's future embodying His Majesty's vision of unity, compassion, and selfless service.

Surrounded by this spirit of service, Dema slowly regained confidence. Yet she also needed a path to rebuild her livelihood. That opportunity came with the establishment of the De-suung Skilling Programme (DSP) in April 2021, a visionary initiative from His Majesty the King, transforming service into empowerment.

The programme was designed to equip De-suups and youth with practical, market-relevant skills for employment, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance. As His Majesty the King stated, "Our De-suups have answered the call of duty… The State must reciprocate."

Guided by the vision of "building skillsets and transforming mindsets," with passion discovery as its genesis, DSP expanded across Bhutan, offering training in IT, hospitality, culinary arts, construction, electrical works, entrepreneurship, and more. Since its inception, it has enrolled over 19,000 participants and trained more than 10,000 individuals.

For Dema, DSP became a turning point. She enrolled in bakery and pastry training under internationally trained instructors, including Chef Boon from Thailand. She later completed Bhutan's first barista training programme.

What began as skill-building soon became passion. The emptiness she once felt was replaced by the aroma of freshly baked bread. Baking became healing, purpose, and hope. A defining moment came on 17 September 2021, when DSP trainees had the honor of meeting His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Gyaltsuen at Pemako Hotel for a cake-tasting session. His Majesty guided the trainees on refining taste and discipline, encouraging excellence and attention to detail. These lessons left a lasting imprint on Dema's journey.

Inspired, she took a bold step and opened Southhall Café on 6 August 2022. Today, the café stands as a story of resilience, courage, and transformation. From uncertainty to entrepreneurship, Dema's journey reflects the impact of the De-suung spirit and DSP. Her café is known not only for its pastries but also for the dedication and standards she continues to uphold. Beyond her own success, Dema has become a source of opportunity for others. She employs fellow De-suups, supports unemployed youth, and provides On-the-Job Training placements through DSP. For many, Southhall Café has become a space of learning, mentorship, and hope.

Dema's story reflects that true success lies not only in personal achievement but in lifting others along the way. Her café stands as proof that when one person rises with courage, many can rise together. As Southhall Café approaches its fourth anniversary, she remains deeply grateful for the visionary leadership of His Majesty the King and the opportunities created through De-suung and DSP. What once felt like an ending became a new beginning built on service, resilience, and purpose.

Her journey reflects a deeper truth: when a nation comes together under a shared vision of service and responsibility, lives are transformed, potential is unlocked, and communities are strengthened. Through initiatives like De-suung and DSP, His Majesty's vision continues to show that national progress is most powerful when it uplifts every individual.

Building on this vision, we are looking to invite global trainers and individuals with passion in their craft to be part of the initiative as expert contributors. As the De-suung Skilling Programme continues to expand, such engagement can bring diverse skills, practical knowledge, and broader exposure for trainees, further empowering youth with the tools they need for self-reliance and growth.

This aligns with His Majesty's vision of nation-building through human capital development, where empowering people through knowledge and skills transforms individual lives and strengthens the nation.

If you are interested in contributing as a trainer or expert, please visit the link shared below for more details and application.

https://dsp.org.bt
See you in Bhutan.

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SUPPORT OUR FARMERS

FREE
- to visit your tree anytime and use the common areas.
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- Understand some years the trees will produce different numbers of produce.
- Donate the produce to any one of the following Institutions:
  - Hospital patients (Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital in Thimphu)
  - Bhutan Kidney Foundation
  - Monks at the Dobji Monastic School, Paro
  - Nunnery
  - The Happiness Farm
- or make a donation of your choice
- Harvest and enjoy fruits



Membership Options, Duration, and Pricing:

We are thrilled to announce the launch of our new exciting initiative: the First-of-its-Kind Fruit Tree Membership Project at The Happiness Farm 1. This farm-orchard project aims to provide individuals with the unique opportunity to own and enjoy the fruits of Japanese Pears, and Apple trees for a specified duration.
We are offering three Membership options on a first-come, first-served basis, with limited trees available.

Happiness Farm Yearly Membership Package

For Residents: Nu 50,000/year

1
- Apple tree
- Pear tree

4
- free lunches
- free dinners
- breakfasts

FREE
- 2 rooms for two nights
- to visit your tree anytime and use the common areas.
- Able to book rooms and meals at members discount of 20%



Please note

Please note that by participating in this project, you will have full ownership of the Fruiting Trees and the right to enjoy its harvest throughout the chosen duration. However, please be informed that this ownership/membership does not extend to the land itself.

In the event that you are unable to personally nurture and harvest the fruits from your tree, we encourage you to consider donating them to a local institution, school, or charity. By doing so, you contribute to the local employment and economy of the community through your goodwill and participation.



The Happiness Farm will post the detailed information regarding the Project on our Facebook page - including tree availability, contract terms and conditions. Please visit our social media page regularly to access all the necessary information and make an informed decision about becoming a Proud Tree Owner.

For Non-Residents:

1
- Apple tree
- Pear tree

2
- free lunches
- free dinners
- breakfasts
- rooms for 2 nights

Fee Structure

5 years	10 years	20 years
@USD $ 599	@USD $ 999	@USD $ 1799

FREE
- to visit your tree anytime and use the common areas.
- Able to book rooms and meals at members discount of 20% for family members



Corporate Package:

One Fruit Bearing Apple and Pear Trees

Fee Structure

5 years	10 years	20 years
@USD $ 599	@USD $ 999	@USD $ 1799

As an environmentalist at heart, the proceeds from this initiative will be reinvested in the further development of The Happiness Farm 1 and citizen initiatives focused on environmental conservation in the locality. By participating in this project, you will not only enjoy the fruits of your tree but also contribute to the growth and sustainability of the farm and its valuable community and environmental initiatives.
We invite our valued participants to embark on this journey with us in this First-of-its-Kind Fruit Tree Membership Project. We look forward to your kind support in creating a flourishing and environmentally conscious community.

CONTACT US @

Dorji
Farmer & the Founder of the Happiness Farm
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Kurjey Lhakhang

From Permits to Pizza
Kurjey Revisited

Some acquaintances abroad had expressed interest in visiting Kurjey Lhakhang this July. As I helped them look into domestic flights and gather information on the monastery, it brought back my own first visit there, almost twenty years ago.

I had been invited to teach at Chokyi Gyatso Institute in Dewathang for a few months. As it was my first visit to Bhutan, I wanted to make a full circuit — entering via Phuentsholing in the west and exiting through Samdrup Jongkhar in the east. The highlights of the journey were to be two famous monasteries: Taktsang in Paro and Kurjey in Jakar.

My first question to friends who had visited Bhutan was simple: "How do I get there?" After a range of expensive options were suggested, I settled on the cheapest: night train from Kolkata to Siliguri, then ask at the bus station.

After a hearty breakfast of puri and aloo dum, I struck up a conversation with a chai-wallah — a broad, genial man whose handlebar moustache twitched as he proudly declared his brew "the best in all of Siliguri." I had no reference point, but it was certainly rich and full-flavoured, and exactly what I needed after a night on the train.

I thanked him and began my enquiries. There was an afternoon bus to Phuentsholing, and others heading to the Indian border town of Jaigaon. I chose the former. With a few hours to spare, I set out to explore Siliguri, a city I knew of only from the biographies of Tibetan lamas who had spent time here after fleeing Tibet.

As I wandered along what I later learned was Hill Cart Road, a bus rattled past, its conductor banging on the side and shouting, "Jaigaon, Jaigaon!" Suddenly I recalled this had been one of my options. I called out for it to stop, and after an ear-splitting screech of brakes, I was on my way.

This proved to be a good choice. Immigration in Jaigaon and Phuentsholing were still open when I arrived at the border. The Indian side involved a simple exit stamp; Bhutan was a more time-consuming endeavour. Rather than a cursory check at a border post, I was ushered into a room where tea was kindly served, and after about half an hour I was handed a wad of permits — some for check-posts, others for monasteries. I quickly confirmed that Taktsang and Kurjey were included. Having never received permits for anything in my life, I sensed their importance and immediately tucked them into the safest pocket of my backpack.

A young Bhutanese doctor I had met in Nepal had kindly arranged for me to stay with friends in Phuentsholing and Paro — a generous gesture that was not only a warm introduction to Bhutan but a welcome relief to my very limited budget.

My night halt in Phuentsholing was in the town itself, while my place in Paro sat high in the valley, surrounded by apple orchards — different worlds, but both with wonderfully hospitable hosts.

But the real highlight was, of course, Taktsang. With my permit safely tucked into my day pack, I set out early the next morning, and neither the monastery nor the view disappointed.

As a devoted follower of Guru Rinpoche, I could barely contain my excitement at being in a place where the great yogi had once subdued negative forces and meditated. I imagined my footsteps tracing the very ground where he had once walked. I thought of the great masters who had done retreats at this monastery, and felt a deep sense of awe knowing that terma — dharma treasures — still lay concealed here. It was pure magic.

Thimphu passed quickly — a city I promised myself I would return to when I had more time — and I was soon on the local bus to Jakar. It was packed, and the locals were as curious about me as I was about them.

When I explained that I was travelling alone, the surprise on their faces made clear that independent travel in Bhutan was far from common. The road climbed and dipped over dramatic passes until, at last, the wide calm of Bumthang opened before us.

As the bus rounded a particularly winding stretch of

road, the man beside me pointed out Jakar Dzong on the left. On the opposite side of the valley, he indicated Karchu Monastery — home to the esteemed master Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche, whom I had had the honour of serving in Taipei, and who had graciously invited me to stay for the next few days.

Jakar itself was a true gem — not only for its sacred sites, but for a detail that delighted the traveller in me: they had pizza and coffee, very likely a legacy of Swiss development volunteers who had worked in the area.

My room at the guesthouse was warm and cosy, with views across the valley to Jakar Dzong. The next morning, the monks assigned to show me around asked where I would like to visit first. As the earliest place Guru Rinpoche had visited in Bhutan, and the site where the great yogi's body print is cast on the rock face of a cave, my reply was instant: Kurjey Lhakhang.

Despite guarding my permits as carefully as gold, when we reached the monastery, I discovered I had misplaced the one that mattered most. Fortunately, the monks accompanying me knew the temple guardian, and a gentle word was enough to see me through.

Inside, I prostrated before the body print cast on the rock face — neither carved nor embedded but simply there, like a shadow of the great master's presence. As I hit the floor, I noticed a footprint in the wooden boards beneath me. The monks explained that it had appeared spontaneously after a gomchen — a lay priest — had come to offer prostrations.

To the ordinary mind this seems impossible. We experience matter as solid and fixed. But this solidity is a product of how we perceive reality, not a description of reality as it actually is.

What we take to be solid and independent is, in reality, empty of any fixed inherent nature — arising moment to moment in dependence on causes, conditions, and the mind that perceives it. For most of us this remains a philosophical idea. For a fully realised being, it is direct experience.

It is from within that experience that such phenomena arise. The realised mind operates from a dimension in which the distinction between flesh, wood, and stone no longer holds in the way we imagine. Such prints are not made in any ordinary sense — they are the natural expression of a realisation so complete that the boundaries we imagine to exist between mind and matter simply cease to hold.

Such feats are not, of course, the aim of Buddhist practice, and realized masters and yogis would shun any deliberate display of spiritual powers to impress or gain prestige. Yet, as with this footprint, they sometimes appear naturally. Otherwise, they are created as legacies to inspire future generations, kindle faith in sceptics, and, in today's world, challenge the rigid views shaped by the limited parameters of science and reason.

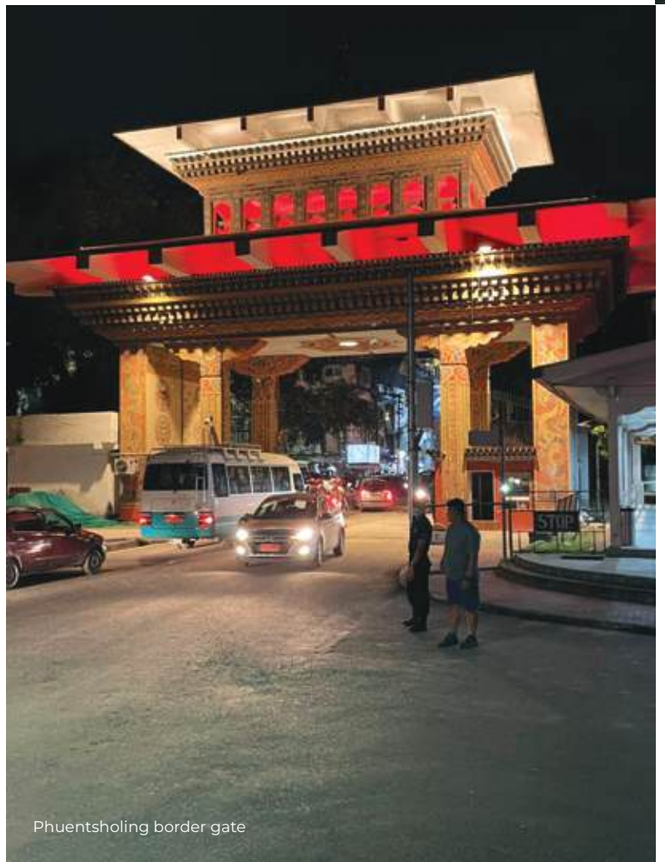
In the corner of the temple, an old woman sat chanting, counting off the beads on a mala polished smooth from years of use. The lines on her face told of a life of hard work, yet her features remained soft and gentle.

I placed a small offering beside her. She glanced at me briefly, her expression unchanged, her attention already returned to her practice. For a moment I felt a connection — unspoken, yet strangely strong — the kind that is difficult to explain.

Who knows, perhaps we had met in this very place in a previous life. Maybe I had been a chicken she had raised. The laws of karma and interdependence move in ways the ordinary mind cannot begin to grasp. Yet, we rarely pause to consider how limited that ordinary mind actually is.

For all our believed sophistication and confidence in open-mindedness, we remain largely the product of our experiences, education, and culture — no different, in this sense, from the frog in a parable, who spent his life in a well and could not conceive of water greater than what he had always known. When he was finally brought to the ocean, the story goes, he could not accept what he saw. It was simply outside his field of reference. His head exploded.


Jakar Lhakhang


Phuentsholing border gate

The Jakar area is home to more sacred sites — Tamshing Monastery, the seat of the famous Bhutanese treasure revealer Pema Lingpa; Membartsho, a deep pool where Pema Lingpa had dived in carrying a burning lamp and emerged with treasures, the flame still burning; and Jambey Lhakhang, one of 108 monasteries said to have been constructed in a single night.

But I had fulfilled one of my life's aspirations — to visit Taktsang and Kurjey monasteries, two of the most revered among the many sacred sites in Bhutan blessed by Guru Rinpoche — and, despite the significance of the occasion, I celebrated it in the most ordinary way: with a large double cheese pizza and a coffee.

Winking at one of my monk companions, I reasoned that if all phenomena are equally empty of inherent existence, then ultimately pizza and coffee are no less sacred than anything else. The logic drew a laugh from another monk. "Good excuse," he said, smiling as he helped himself to a slice.

I pray that my acquaintances who will visit in July find Kurjey as remarkable as I did two decades ago — and that the journey itself, with all its unexpected turns and chance encounters, will offer them something of its own. May they approach it — and everything they encounter along the way — with openness, allowing its mysteries to settle quietly in their minds rather than recoiling from what falls outside the frameworks of understanding shaped by Western-influenced education. At the very least, may they avoid the fate of the frog in the well, and keep their heads intact!

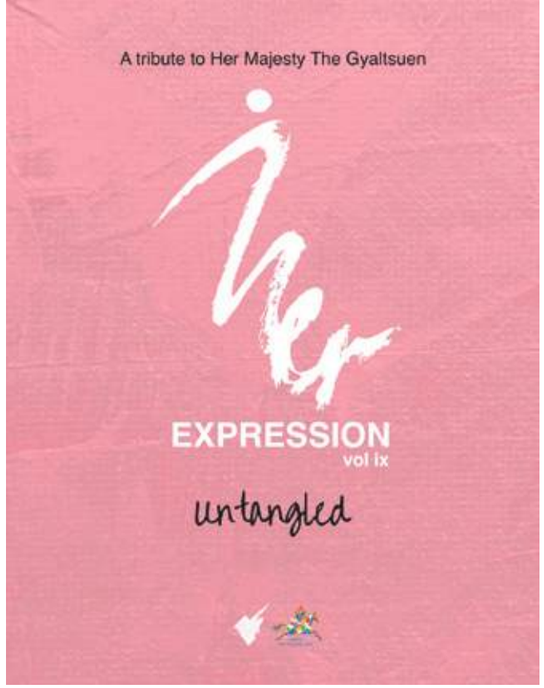


SHENPHEN ZANGPO

He was born in Swansea, UK, but spent more than 28 years practicing and studying Buddhism in Taiwan and Japan, and around 15 years working with substance abusers in Bhutan, teaching meditation and organizing drug outreach programmes. Currently, he is engaged in activities that present the traditional wisdom of the Dharma to the youth of Bhutan in a modern and relevant way.

Art review

HER EXPRESSION VOL. IX



August 2026 | LAF Festival Highlights
Aug 8-9, 2026 - Untangling and collection of old, soiled and powerless prayer flags at at Chelela
Aug 14-24, 2026 - Lungta Art Exchange Program

To explore the full festival journey and upcoming activities, visit www.lungta.vastbhutan.org.bt or contact: Ms. Sonam Deki, mobile number: +975 77752813.

Her Expression, an annual art exhibition lovingly dedicated to Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen, Jetsun Pema Wangchuck, honours the creative voices and artistic expressions of women. Rooted in the belief that art can empower, connect, and transform, Her Expression celebrates the heART of women and their limitless creative potential.

Conditioned expectations often narrow the paths available to women in the arts. Confidence falters without exposure, and opportunities remain limited. Since its inception in 2014, the exhibition has steadily evolved into an important platform for women, offering a welcoming space for experimentation, learning, and shared experience.

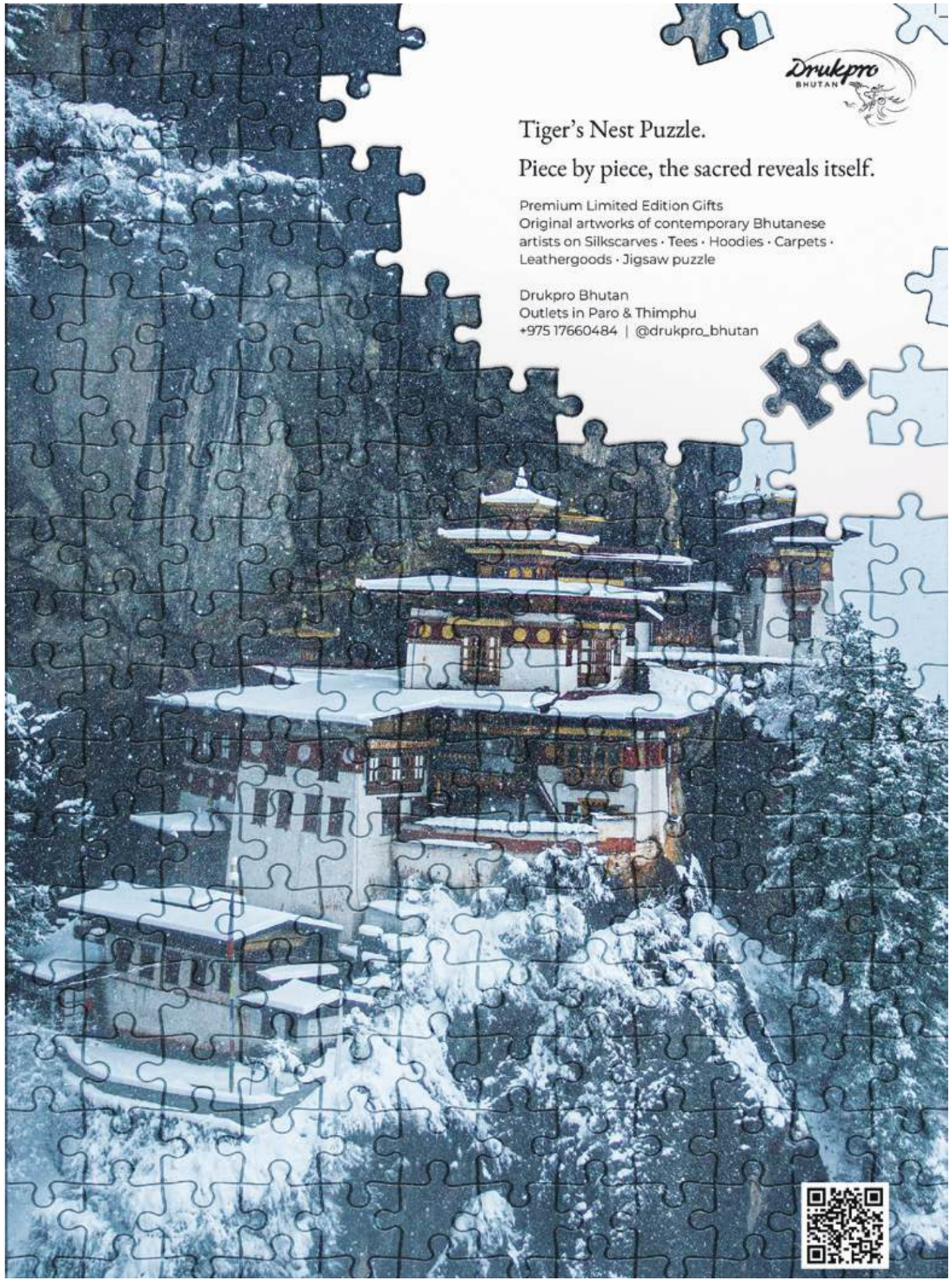
Her Expression Vol. IX, themed Untangled, is the highlight of the Lungta Art Festival 2026 (LAF2026).

In honour of Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen's 36th Birth Anniversary, this year's edition has expanded from an annual exhibition into a month-long festival and will feature as a festival hereon. Inspired by Her Majesty's birth year, the festival pays tribute to her enduring grace, compassion, wisdom, and the profound love and care she continues to bestow upon the nation.

We are deeply grateful to Her Majesty for gracing the opening of this year's exhibition, inspiring women artists in the country and believing in their creative journeys.

VAST Bhutan

This review is brought to you by VAST Bhutan, a registered civil society organization. VAST Bhutan over 25 years of existence has helped nurture several young artists and supported their endeavors.
For purchase of original Bhutanese contemporary artworks contact: Ms. Sonam Deki, mobile number: +975 77752813



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IN THE PRESS

Drukair Marks Coronation Day and Social Forestry Day





In celebration of Coronation Day and Social Forestry Day, Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, organized a tree plantation program and enhanced its workspaces with flowering plants, reaffirming its commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability. The initiative reflects Bhutan's enduring conservation values inspired by the visionary leadership of His Majesty The Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

The observance was graced by Yab Dasho Dhondup Gyaltshen and commenced with the offering of butter lamps and prayers for the long life, good health, and continued wellbeing of His Majesty The Druk Gyalpo. This was followed by the tree plantation program, symbolizing Drukair's dedication to fostering a greener and healthier future.

A similar initiative was also carried out at the Thimphu Ticketing Office, further demonstrating Drukair's commitment to promoting environmental responsibility both on the ground and in the skies.

Elevating Excellence in the Skies





Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, celebrated the promotion of Captains Sangay Tshogyel and Ugyen Dorji of its Rotary Wing Division from PIC Level 1 to PIC Level 2.

The ceremony, graced by Yab Dasho Dhondup Gyaltshen and attended by Drukair management, featured traditional proceedings including the Marchang, Zhudrey Phuensum, awarding of bars, and Khadar ceremony. The promotion recognizes the captains' dedication and operational excellence. With over 1,600 and 1,500 flight hours respectively, Captains Sangay Tshogyel and Ugyen Dorji have demonstrated outstanding professionalism and commitment to aviation. Drukair congratulates both captains and wishes them continued success in their careers.

Rimdro Conducted for Wellbeing and Safe Operations

A three-day Rimdro, organized by Drukair's Flight Operations and Crew Training Division, was conducted with prayers and offerings dedicated to the wellbeing and longevity of Their Majesties.

The sacred ceremony sought blessings for the continued peace and prosperity of the Kingdom and its people, as well as for the safety of flight operations and the success of Drukair.

May the blessings of this offering bring peace, happiness, and prosperity to all.



Strengthening Our Journey Ahead

Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, launched its Corporate Strategic Plan for 2026-2035, outlining a clear vision for growth, stronger connectivity, and enhanced passenger experience. Anchoring Drukair's growth strategy is its role at Gelephu Mindfulness City, where the airline will serve as the primary air connectivity provider for Gelephu International Airport.

To meet this opportunity, Drukair is expanding its fleet, adding capacity and range to connect GMC with regional and international markets. A continued commitment to connecting Bhutan with the world.



Drukair Hosts Agents Seminar in Bangkok



Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, in collaboration with its General Sales Agent in Thailand, Oriole Travels & Tours Co., Ltd, successfully hosted the Drukair Agents Seminar in Bangkok following the reinstatement of the twice-weekly Bangkok-Paro service via Guwahati on 2 April 2026.

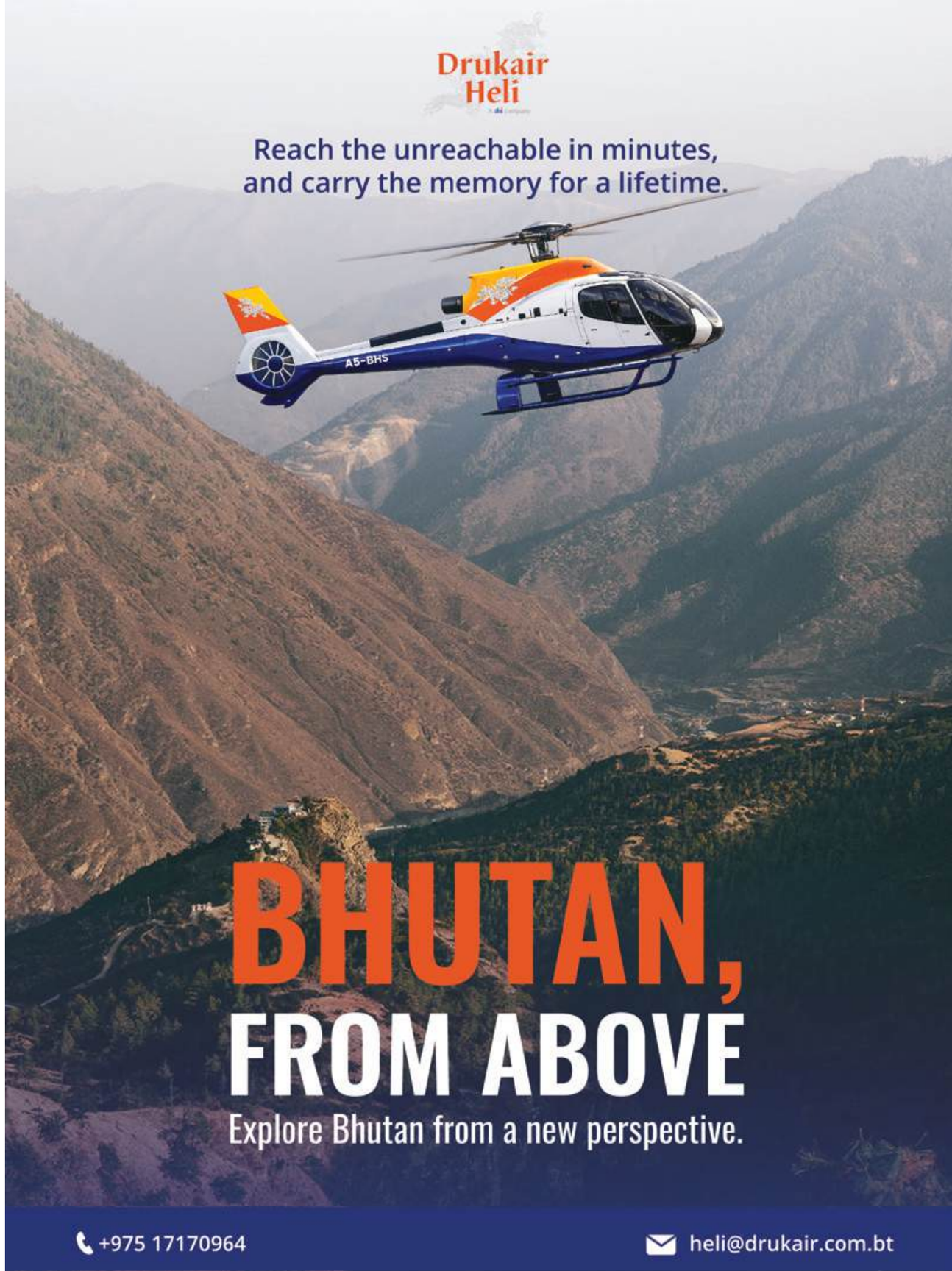
The seminar brought together representatives from the tourism, travel, cargo, and business sectors, including officials from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Tourism Council of Thailand, and various industry associations. The event served as a platform to strengthen partnerships, raise awareness of Drukair's products and services, and promote the enhanced connectivity between Bhutan, Thailand, and Northeast India.

Honoured by the presence of His Excellency, the Ambassador of Bhutan to the Kingdom of Thailand, the seminar highlighted the growing partnership between Bhutan and Thailand and the role of air connectivity in advancing tourism, trade, and future collaboration. It also encouraged industry partners to actively promote Bhutan as a unique, high-value, and sustainable travel destination.

Strengthening Global Partnerships at Bhutan International Travel Mart 2026

Drukair was proud to be the official travel partner of the inaugural Bhutan International Travel Mart (BITM) 2026, held from 11-13 June at Zhichenkhar. The event provided an excellent platform to strengthen industry partnerships, engage with international buyers, and showcase Drukair's role in supporting Bhutan's tourism growth, including future connectivity to Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC).




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INFO & TIPS

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International airties, tour promoters and travel agents abroad are invited to communicate their reservation requirements with the space control of Drukair.

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Request all passengers to reconfirm their reservations 72 hours prior to departure. For passengers in Bhutan, reconfirmation can be either done at any Drukair offices or you can contact reservation@drukair.com.bt or call Drukair's toll free no: 1300 / WhatsApp number +975 17131300 during office hours 07:00 - 21:00 (GMT+6).

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All information mentioned above are based on those valid at the time of print and are, therefore, subject to change. For further information, contact any Drukair Office or its agents in your area or visit our website: *www.drukair.com.bt*

VISA REQUIREMENTS TO ENTER BHUTAN

Visitors of all nationalities, except those from India, require a visa before entering Bhutan. For all visitors, except those from Bangladesh and the Maldives, this visa must be applied for and approved in advance of travel. Visitors from Bangladesh and the Maldives also require a visa, but this can be applied for and approved either in advance of travel or upon arrival in Bhutan.

Visitors from India are able to apply for a permit but are required to hold an Indian passport or an Indian voter ID card. For Indian nationals under the age of 18, a passport or a birth certificate can be used to enter and they must be accompanied by a legal guardian. Nationals from Switzerland and Thailand holding diplomatic or government-official passports are eligible for a visa at their port of entry.

Before travelling, visitors from India, Bangladesh and the Maldives can apply for a permit (Indian nationals) or visa (Bangladeshi or Maldivian nationals) online. You may also apply at the point of entry, but please be aware that there may be a long wait depending on the number of applicants at the time. We recommend arranging your permit/visa beforehand.

Note to all passengers: All passengers are advised to check their travel document validity. For passengers traveling with their passport, validity of their passport should not be less than six months from the date of depature from Bhutan. Drukair will not be liable and will refuse check-in of those passengers whose passport does not meet the validity requirement.

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTION

For safety, passengers are required to fasten seat belts during take off and landing. However, they are advised to keep the seat belts fastened during the entire flight.

Smoking and chewing "doma" (areca nut and betel leaf) in the aircraft are strictly prohibited.

SPECIAL LOUNGES

Executive/Business Class passengers, including counter upgrades/ FFP entitlements as per FFP policy document can avail the comfort of our special lounges. They offer a buffet service, Internet access points and washroom facilities.

TRAVEL TIPS

Transit time should not exceed 24 hours to connect on your onward carrier and to avoid any misconnections. Please note that unfortunately we are unable to offer advice or guidance on frequently changing restrictions in individual countries, therefore all passengers are advised to check related government websites for further travel advice.

As per the notice circulated by Thai Immigration Office to all airlines, visa on arrival for passengers holding one-way or open ticket will not be extended. Therefore, such passengers are advised to obtain necessary visa prior from the concerned diplomatic representations abroad to avoid being inconvenienced and deported. All transit passengers are requested to observe the following procedures pertaining to transit check-in.
Passengers can check-in on Drukair flights on transit at Bangkok without having to go through immigrations. The process is as follows:

Outbound Flights - Out of Paro
To kindly inform the check-in counter at Paro on details of the onward flight
Baggage will then be tagged as transit showing final destination of the passenger on the onward carrier
At the transit check-in at Bangkok passengers are requested to present their baggage tag to the transit desk
The boarding pass is issued on the onward carrier and the baggage transferred
For any special assistance required for groups on transit you may please email enquiry@drukair.com.bt

MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

Drukair offers multi-cuisine menu on board. Bangkok Airways Catering, Paro Catering, Taj Group and SATS provide most of our in-flight catering.
Meals are served after a flight is airborne for reasonable duration. The timings are:

Breakfast: 0730 - 1030
Lunch: 1030 - 1430
Dinner: 1830 - 2130

On one-hour sector flight, snacks are served. Refreshment and drinks are served throughout the duration of the flight.

For detailed carrier's general condition of carriage for passenger & baggage, visit
drukair.com.bt/terms-and-conditions/conditions-of-carriage/

Customs Information

CUSTOMS DECLARATION

Passengers entering Bhutan have to pass through the customs checks. All passengers carrying baggage in excess of allowable limit (which is goods worth US $1000), or, dutiable goods, or, restricted items, must make declaration in the prescribed form.
Should the passengers fail to make the declaration in whole, or, file incomplete declaration, as against the mandate of Section 96, Ch. 13 of the Customs Act of Bhutan, 2017 (CAB), it shall lead to invocation of Section 143 & 146, Ch. 19 of the CAB.
Note: Baggage or goods in commercial nature shall not be considered as free baggage allowance even if the value of the goods is less than US$ 1000 or equivalent Ngultrum.

FREE BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE FOR AIR PASSENGERS

Personal effects up to the assessed value of US$ 1,000 or equivalent
in Ngultrum subject to the ceiling prescribed below:

(a) Alcohol/Spirits – 2 bottles, each bottle not larger than one liter
(b) Perfume: 1 bottle, not larger than 2 ounces
(c) Gold (including jewellery) – 50 grams
(d) Silver (including jewellery) – 1 kilogram
(e) Clothing items: Maximum of 10 pieces each of type of clothing whether stitched or unstitched
(f) Other household or personal goods including electronics and bedding shall be limited to one piece each.
(g) Items of gifts and presents shall be included in the above free allowance.

Note: Baggage or goods in commercial nature shall not be considered as free baggage allowance even if the value of the goods is less than US$ 1000 or equivalent Ngultrum.

FREE BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE FOR FOREIGN TOURIST

(a) Used personal effects and articles reasonably required for the visit provided items imported are for personal use and shall be re-exported upon leaving Bhutan.
(b) Import free of Customs duty, articles up to Ngultrum 10,000/- or equivalent, for personal use or as gifts and travel souvenirs if carried on the person or in the accompanied baggage, including spirit of not more than two liters and perfume of not more than 100 ml.
(c) High value articles and sports items as approved and imported in reasonable quantities shall be considered under temporary admission considering that the articles or items are re-exported on leaving Bhutan.

LIST OF RESTRICTED GOODS:

i. Arms and Ammunitions
ii. Gold and Silver in excess of free baggage allowance
iii. Explosives and explosives devices
iv. Medicinal products including narcotics and psychotropic substance for medical use
v. Other narcotics and psychotropic substances and precursor
vi. Animal and their parts and products including food
vii. Plants, their parts (seeds/fruits/flowers/shoots/roots/ tissues) and products
viii. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and their products
ix. Industrial and toxic wastes and residues
x. Wireless and remote sensing telecommunication and broadcasting equipment
xi. Scraps
xii. Used or second hand goods, vehicles, machinery and equipment
xiii. Chemical and Fertilizers
xiv. Plastic packing materials
xv. Valuable cultural properties
xvi. Ozone Depleting substances
xvii. Intellectual property rights
xviii. Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS)/Drones

Note: A tourist can bring US$10,000 or equivalent without declaring. If the amount exceeds US$10,000, it must be declared at the customs.

LIST OF PROHIBITED GOODS:

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

i. Narcotics and psychotropic drugs and substances
ii. Pornographic materials
iii. Animals and plants classified as endangered species and their parts and products

Department of Revenue and Customs
Ministry of Finance

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Key Information



Trekking in Bhutan

Bhutan's breathtaking landscapes and diverse terrains make it a paradise for trekking enthusiasts. From challenging high-altitude treks to scenic and moderate trails, there are various trekking options to explore the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Bhutan. Here are some popular trekking routes to consider:

Druk Path Trek: This trek is a great introduction to Bhutan's natural and cultural wonders. It takes you from Paro to Thimphu, passing through stunning alpine meadows, rhododendron forests, and serene mountain lakes. Along the way, you can also visit ancient monasteries and enjoy panoramic views of the Himalayas.

Jomolhari Trek: Considered one of the most beautiful treks in Bhutan, the Jomolhari Trek offers a challenging yet rewarding experience. It takes you to the base camp of Mount Jomolhari, the second highest peak in Bhutan. The trail passes through remote villages, pristine valleys, and high mountain passes, offering stunning views of snow-capped peaks.

Snowman Trek: For experienced trekkers seeking an ultimate adventure, the Snowman Trek is an epic journey that traverses through Bhutan's remote and untouched wilderness. It is one of the most challenging treks in the world, taking about 27 days to complete. The trail leads through high mountain passes, pristine lakes, and remote villages, showcasing Bhutan's pristine beauty.

Trans Bhutan Trail Trek: The Trans Bhutan Trail is a 403km route, spanning from Haa in the West of Bhutan to Trashigang in the East. It is considered one of the world's greatest walks and one of the best hiking routes in Asia. The trail traverses through remote villages, ancient monasteries, terraced fields, dense forests, and pristine alpine meadows, providing a comprehensive glimpse into the country's natural beauty and cultural heritage.

Bumthang Cultural Trek: This trek combines nature and culture, taking you through the beautiful Bumthang Valley, known as the cultural heartland of Bhutan. You can visit ancient temples, monasteries, and remote villages, while enjoying the scenic landscapes of green valleys, pristine forests, and farmlands.

Dagala Thousand Lakes Trek: Offering breathtaking views of high mountain passes and numerous glacial lakes, the Dagala Thousand Lakes Trek is a moderate trek suitable for all fitness levels. The trek takes you through alpine meadows, yak herders' camps, and serene lakes, providing ample opportunities for photography and nature exploration.

Before embarking on any trek in Bhutan, it is essential to obtain the necessary permits and hire a licensed guide. The best time for trekking in Bhutan is during spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November) seasons when the weather is favorable and the landscapes are at their most vibrant.

Other Treks in Bhutan

Bumdra Trek
Bumthang Owl Trek
Gangtey Trek
Laya Gasa Trek
Merak Sakteng Trek
Nabji Korphu Trek
Rodung La Trek
Samtengang Winter Trek
Soi Yaktsa Trek
Salt Route Trek
Sinchula Trek

Average Temperature

Month	Figures in Centigrade	Paro	Thimphu	Punakha	Wangdue	Trongsa	Bumthang	Mongar	Trashigang	Gelephu
JAN	MAX	9.4	.3	16.1	17.0	13.0	10.8	15.5	20.4	24
	MIN	-5.8	-2.6	4.2	4.3	-0.2	-5.1	8.2	10.5	13
FEB	MAX	13.4	14.4	19.6	19.0	13.9	10.0	15.9	21.7	27
	MIN	1.5	0.6	5.3	7.8	0.4	-1.4	8.3	11.5	15
MAR	MAX	14.5	16.4	21.12	22.8	16.7	16.2	20.0	24.8	32
	MIN	0.6	3.9	9.2	10.4	4.4	3.5	11.6	14.4	22
APR	MAX	17.6	20.0	24.4	26.2	20.1	18.7	2.8	28.3	32
	MIN	4.6	7.1	11.2	12.9	6.6	3.9	14.0	17.0	23
MAY	MAX	23.5	22.5	27.2	29.1	21.0	21.3	25.1	30.0	31
	MIN	10.6	13.1	14.2	17.7	11.6	9.5	17.4	20.6	25
JUN	MAX	25.4	24.4	31.2	29.2	22.2	22.5	26.1	30.7	31
	MIN	14.1	15.2	19.5	20.1	13.6	3.5	19.5	22.6	26
JUL	MAX	26.8	18.9	32.0	18.4	25.3	14.1	16.1	30.5	31
	MIN	14.9	13.4	21.6	16.2	15.3	10.9	15.8	23.1	26
AUG	MAX	25.3	25.0	31.4	29.1	23.8	23.0	25.4	30.2	32
	MIN	14.7	15.8	19.8	20.0	15.0	13.7	19.6	22.7	26
SEPT	MAX	23.4	23.1	29.9	27.5	22.6	21.6	24.7	30.0	31
	MIN	11.7	15.0	20.4	19.1	14.2	12.1	19.4	23.9	25
OCT	MAX	18.7	21.9	27.8	26.1	21.8	19.5	22.7	29.1	30
	MIN	7.4	12.4	18.9	14.7	11.7	5.9	15.8	17.7	22
NOV	MAX	13.9	17.9	22.3	22.6	19.8	16.1	19.9	26.1	28
	MIN	1.4	5.0	13.0	9.6	6.4	-0.5	11.2	13.6	17
DEC	MAX	11.2	14.5	15.0	19.1	18.2	12.3	15.7	23.0	25
	MIN	-1.7	-1.1	7.9	6.3	2.5	-2.3	9.5	11.6	14

Driving Time Between Various Places in Bhutan

FROM	TO	DISTANCE (APPROX)	DRIVING TIME
Thimphu	Paro	54 km	1 hr +
Thimphu	Phuentsholing	145 km	4.5 hrs +
Thimphu	Wangduephodrang	70 km	2 hrs +
Thimphu	Punakha	77 km	2 hrs +
Punakha	Wangduephodrang	13 km	30 min +
Wangduephodrang	Trongsa	129 km	4 hrs +
Trongsa	Bumthang	68 km	1.5 hrs +
Bumthang	Mongar	193 km	7 hrs +
Mongar	Lhuentse	76 km	2.5 hrs +
Mongar	Trashigang	91 km	3 hrs +
Trashigang	Chorten Kora	51 km	1.5 hrs +
Trashigang	Samdrup Jongkhar	175 km	6 hrs +
Samdrup Jongkhar	Phuentsholing	400 km	10 hrs +
Thimphu	Gelephu	243 km	6.5 hrs +
Phuentsholing	Gelephu	196 km	4-5 hrs +

Festival Dates for 2026

FESTIVAL NAME	FESTIVAL LOCATION	FESTIVAL DATE
Lhamoi Dromchhen	Trongsa Dzong, Trongsa	22nd – 24th February
Punakha Dromchoe	Punakha Dzong, Punakha	24th – 26th February
Punakha Tshechu	Punakha Dzong, Punakha	27th, 28th February – 1st March
Tharpaling Thongdrol	Tharpaling Lhakhang, Chumey, Bumthang	3rd March
Tangsibi Mani	Tangsibi Lhakhang, Ura Bumthang	4th – 6th March
Chorten Kora	Chorten Kora, Trashiyangtse	3rd March & 19th March
Gomphukora	Gom Kora Lhakhang, Trashiyangtse	26th – 28th March
Talo Tshechu	Talo Gonpa, Punakha	26th – 28th March
Gasa Tshechu	Gasa Dzong, Gasa	26th – 28th March
Zhemgang Tshechu	Zhemgang Dzong, Zhemgang	26th – 28th March
Paro Tshechu	Rinpung Dzong, Paro	29th March – 2nd April (Thongdrel on last day)
Rhododendron Festival	Lamperi Botanical Park,Thimphu	13th – 14th April
Domkhar Tshechu	Domkhar, Chumey, Bumthang.	26th – 28th April
Ura Yakchoe	Ura Lhakhang, Bumthang	28th April – 2nd May
Nimalung Tshechu	Nimalung Dratshang, Chumey, Bumthang	22nd – 24th June
Kurjey Tshechu	Kurjey Lhakhang, Choekhor, Bumthang	24th June
Tour of the Dragon (Mountain Bike Race)	Bumthang to Thimphu	5th September
Thimphu Drubchen	Tashichhodzong, Thimphu	17th September
Haa Tshechu	Lhakhang Karpo, Haa	19th – 21st September
Wangdue Tshechu	Wangduephodrang	19th –21st September
Tamshing Phala Chhoepa	Tamshing lhakhang, Bumthang	21st – 23rd September
Thimphu Tshechu	Tashichhodzong, Thimphu	21st – 23rd September
Gangtey Tshechu	Gangtey Gonpa, Wangduephodrang	24th – 26th September (Thongdral on last day)
Thangbi Mewang	Thangbi Lhakhang, Choekor, Bumthang	26th – 27th September
Pemagatshel Tshechu	Pemagatshel Dzong, Pemagatshel.	18th – 21st October (Thongdral on last day)
Jhomolhari Mountain Festival	Dangochong, Thimphu	14th – 15th October
Chhukha Tshechu	Chhukha Dzong, Chhukha	19th – 21st October
Dechenphu Tshechu	Dechenphu Lhakhang, Thimphu	21st October
Jakar Tshechu	Jakar Dzong, Choekhor, Bumthang.	18th – 21st October
Jambay Lhakhang Drup	Jambay Lhakhang, Choekhor, Bumthang	26th – 29th October
Traakar Duchhoed	Traakar Khakhang, Chumey, Bumthang	27th – 29th October
Black Necked Crane Festival	Gangtey Gonpa, Phobjikha, Wangduephodrang.	11th November
Goenpai Drupchen	Trongsa Dzong, Trongsa	14th – 16th November
Mongar Tshechu	Mongar Dzong, Mongar	17th – 19th November
Trashigang Tshechu	Trashigang Dzong, Trashigang.	18th th – 20th November
Phuentsholing Tshechu	Phuentsholing, Chhukha	17th – 19th November
Jambay Lhakhang Singye Cham	Jambay Lhakhang, Choekhor, Bumthang	24th November
Nalakhar Tshechu	Ngaa Lhakhang, Choekhor, Bumthang	24th – 26th November
Druk Wangyel Tshechu	Douchula, Thimphu	13th December
Trongsa Tshechu	Trongsa Dzong, Trongsa	17th – 21st December (Thongdral on last day)
Lhuentse Tshechu	Lhuentse Dzong, Lhuentse	17th – 21st December (Thongdral on last day)
Samdrup Jongkhar Tshechu	Samdrup Jongkhar	22nd – 24th December
Nabji Lhakhang Drup	Nabji Lhakhang, Nabji, Trongsa	24th – 26th December

National Holidays 2026

Jan 2	Winter Solstice (Nyilo)
Jan 19	Traditional Day of Offerings
Feb 18–19	Losar (Fire Male Horse Year)
Feb 21–23	Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the King
May 2	Birth Anniversary of Third Druk Gyalpo
June 24	Birth Anniversary of Guru Rinpoche
July 18	Buddha's First Sermon
Sept 17	Thimphu Drubchoe
Sept 21–23	Thimphu Tshechu
Sept 23	Blessed Rainy Day
Oct 26	Dashain
Nov 1	Coronation Day of His Majesty the King
Nov 7	Descending Day of Lord Buddha
Nov 11	Birth Anniversary of 4th Druk Gyalpo/Constitution Day
Dec 17	National Day

Negative list on movement of tourist within Bhutan

Prohibited Areas

Place	Dzongkhag
Chekha	Paro
Changju	Samtse
Singye Dzong	Lhuentse
Tobrang	Trashiyangtse
Takpang	Lhuentse
Singphey	Trashiyangtse
Tshampa	Bumthang
Beyond Haa Damthang	Haa

Restricted Areas

Place	Dzongkhag
Gunitsawa	Paro
Soi	Thimphu
Khatang	Bumthang
Lingzhi	Thimphu
Beyond Bumdeling	Trashiyangtse

Note: *However, tourist will be allowed to visit restricted areas identified as trekking route by the Department of Tourism if accompanied by trekking guide.*



Basic Dzongkha

INTRODUCTIONS

Greetings and well wishes
Kuzuzangpola
What is your name?
(for elders or with respect)
Na gi Tshen Ga Chi Mo?
What is your name?
(for friends)
Chhoey gi Ming Ga Chi Mo?
My name is
Ngegi Ming.....Ein
Where are you from?
Chhoey ga te lay mo?
How old are you?
Kay Lo gadem chi Ya si?



Good bye: *Log Jay Gay.*
(Meaning we will meet again)

TRAVEL TALK

Where does this road lead to?
Lam di ga thay jow mo?
Is it far?
Tha ring sa in-na?
Here : *Na/ Nalu*
There : *Pha/ Phalu*
Where? : *Ga Tey?*

Which? : *Gadee?*
In front of : *Dongkha*
Next to : *Bolokha*
Behind : *Japkha*



SHOPPING CONVERSATION

What time does it open?
Chutsho gademchi lu go pchiu mo?

What time does it close?
Chutsho gademchi lu go dam mo?

What is this? : *Ani ga chi mo?*
How much is it? : *Dilu gadem chi mo?*
That's too much : *Gong bom may*



Waiter! : *Wai Chharo!*
(literally meaning friend)
Waitress : *Wai Bumo!*
(literally meaning girl)
Please Have/ Eat : *Zhey*
Water : *Chhu*
Hot Water : *Chhu Tshe*
Milk Tea : *Na Ja*
Butter Tea : *Su Ja*
Get me : *...Nang*



TELEPHONE TETE-A TETE

Hello : *Kuzoozangpo La*
Who is speaking : *Ga Sung Mo La?*
I'm....Speaking : *Nga ....Zhu Do La*
Yes, Yes : *Ong, Ong*
Yes in Affirmative : *Ein Ein La*
Roger/ Signing off : *Las La. Laso La*

It was tasty

Zhim bay (While making a gesture of moving one's forefinger in front of the cheek)



No more, thanks

Me Zhu (while making a gesture of moving one's hand in front of the mouth)



Thank you
Kardrinchhey

EMERGENCY ESSENTIALS

I'm ill : *Nga nau may*

Where is the hospital?
Menkhang ga tey in na?

Where is the toilet?
Chhapsa ga tey in-na?



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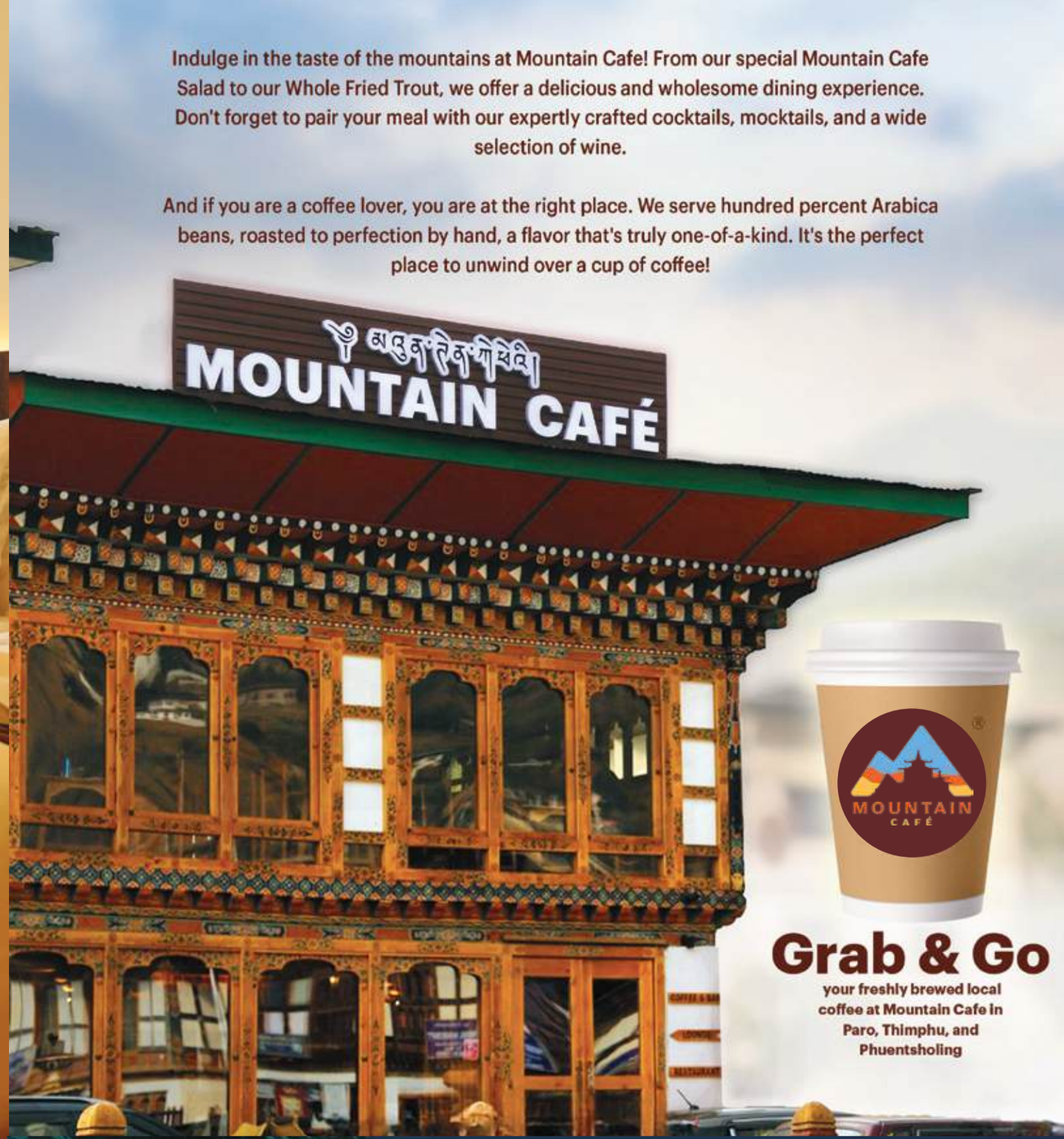
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