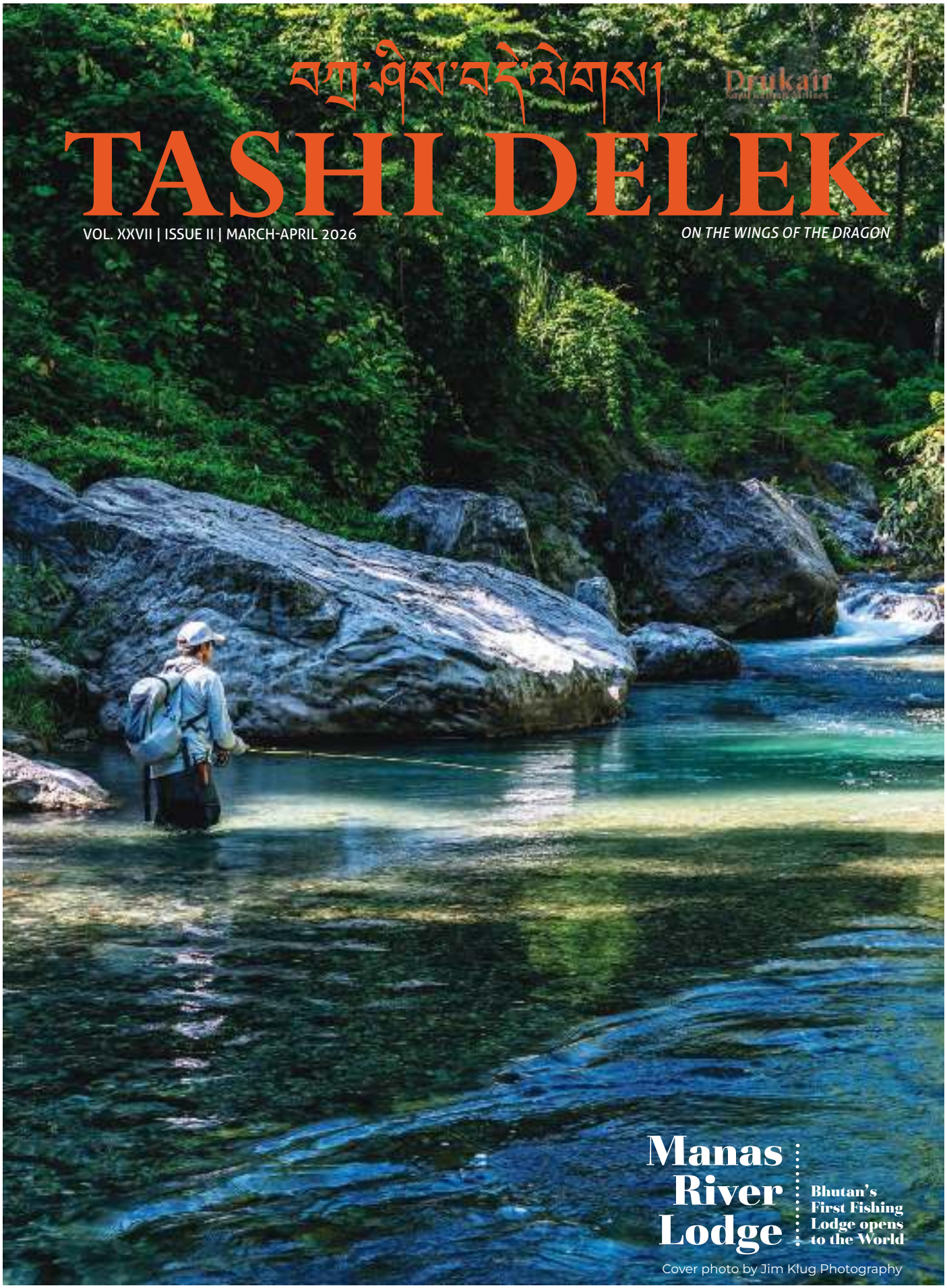


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Drukair

TASHI DELEK

VOL. XXVII | ISSUE II | MARCH-APRIL 2026

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Manas River Lodge

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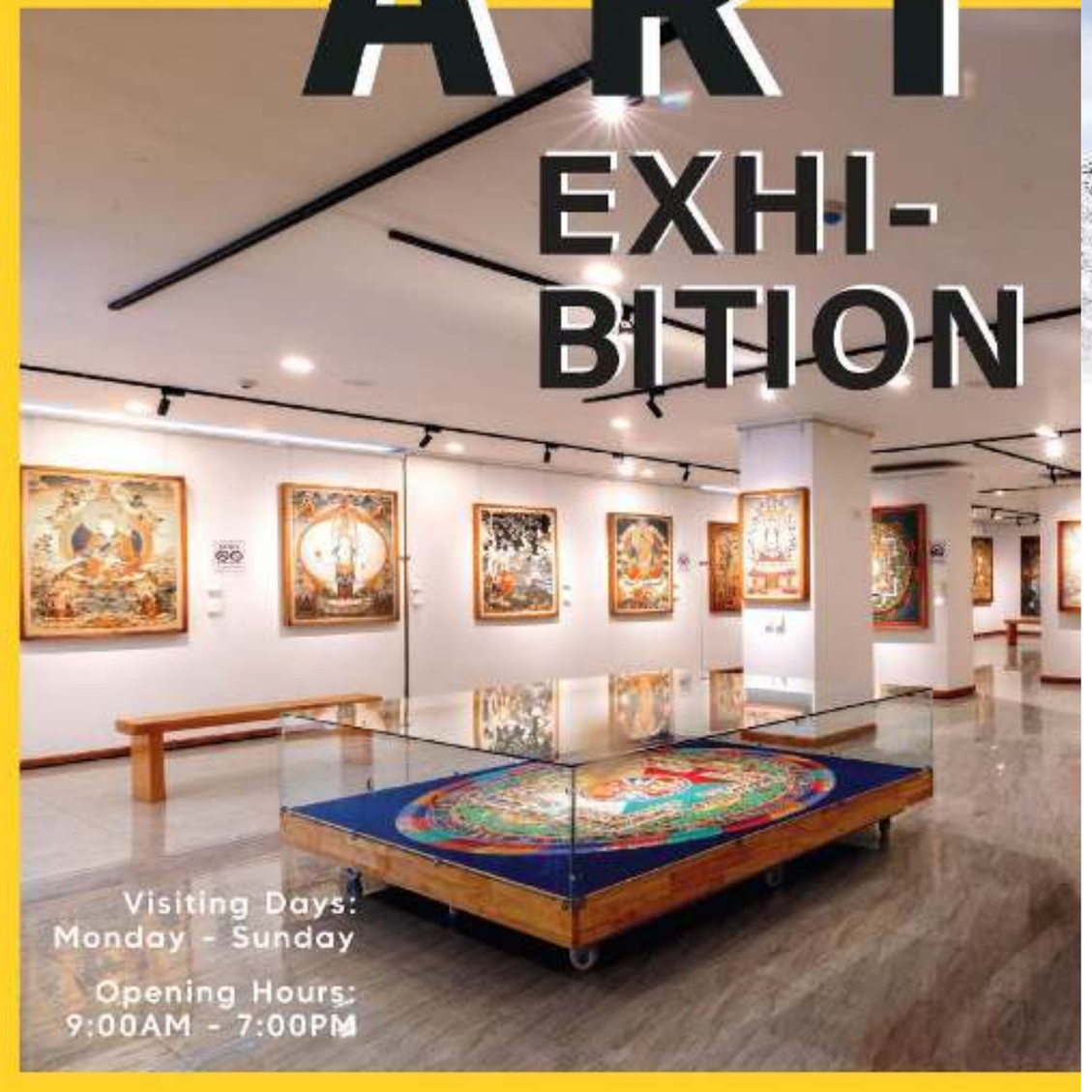
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Supported by robust financing, technology transformation, and human capital development, the 10X Roadmap positions DHI and Group to unlock long-term national growth and global opportunities.

Our Mission

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

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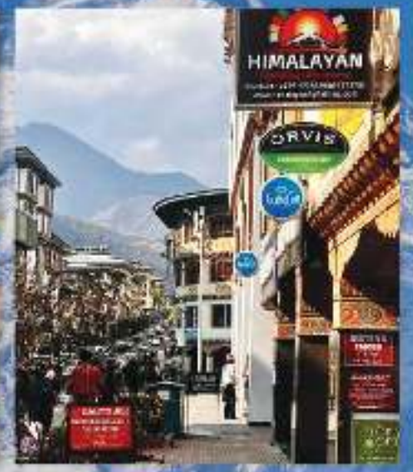
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Vision

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Stories within

Images by Matt Dutile exclusively for Himalayan Echoes

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This unique destination brings together an exceptional collection of Bhutan made arts and crafts, where age old traditions are thoughtfully reimagined for contemporary living. Most products are carefully sourced from rural communities, carrying with them the stories, skills, and spirit of Bhutan's artisans.





More than a market place, it is a living celebration of Bhutan's cultural heritage. By creating a sustainable platform for traditional crafts, the initiative helps preserve time honored techniques while empowering artisans and fostering inclusive socio economic development across the country. Every visit supports culture, community, and craftsmanship, making it an experience as meaningful as it is memorable.



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INSIDE

Mindful Nation: Bhutan, a Haven for Travel 24

From Germany to the Himalayas: A Semester in Bhutan 30

Bhutan's Beastie Boys 34





When The Guru Departs, Color Fades 38

29 and counting 42

Manas River Lodge: Bhutan's First Fishing Lodge opens to the World 48

The Power of a Gaze 54

Beyond the Classroom, Beyond Bhutan 60

Choki School: A Window into Bhutan's Living Heritage 66

From Farmers to Cafés: The Bhutan Mountain Coffee Story 68



Dear Passengers,



Tandi Wangchuk
Chief Executive Officer
Drukair Corporation Ltd.

Welcome aboard Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines.

As spring arrives in Bhutan, the nation's landscapes awaken in a vibrant display of color and life. Valleys bloom, forests renew themselves, and the rhythm of nature gently reminds us of the importance of balance, harmony, and renewal. The months of March and April invite reflection – on our shared connections, the strength of community, and the pursuit of purposeful growth that benefits both people and the planet.

At Drukair, our mission extends far beyond transportation. As the national flag carrier of the Kingdom of Bhutan, we are entrusted with a responsibility that reflects the aspirations of our nation. We serve as a bridge – connecting people, cultures, and opportunities – guided by Bhutan's philosophy of sustainability and mindful development. Every route we operate strengthens not only physical connectivity, but also supports the broader ambitions of tourism, education, trade, and cultural exchange, contributing meaningfully to national progress and global engagement.

This season marks an important step in strengthening that commitment. The introduction of a third weekly frequency to Singapore enhances connectivity with one of Asia's key hubs, while the reinstatement of the Guwahati–Bangkok route improves regional accessibility and creates new pathways for economic collaboration, tourism, and cultural interaction. These developments reflect our ongoing effort to expand opportunities while ensuring that growth remains aligned with Bhutan's vision of high-value, sustainable development.

At the same time, we recognize that progress must always be thoughtful and responsible. Safety, operational excellence, and environmental stewardship remain at the core of everything we do. We continue to invest in strengthening our services, improving efficiency, and reducing our environmental footprint, ensuring that our growth supports the long-term well-being of our communities and environment.

Our dedicated teams, both in the air and on the ground, embody the warmth, humility, and genuine care that define Bhutanese hospitality, creating meaningful experiences for every passenger.

In this issue of Tashi Delek, we celebrate stories that inspire, destinations that enrich, and journeys that connect us to the wider world. Whether you travel for personal discovery, family, or business, we are deeply honored to be part of your journey.

On behalf of the Drukair family, I extend my sincere gratitude for your continued trust and support. May this season of renewal bring you safe travels, fresh perspectives, and meaningful connections.

Have a pleasant flight.

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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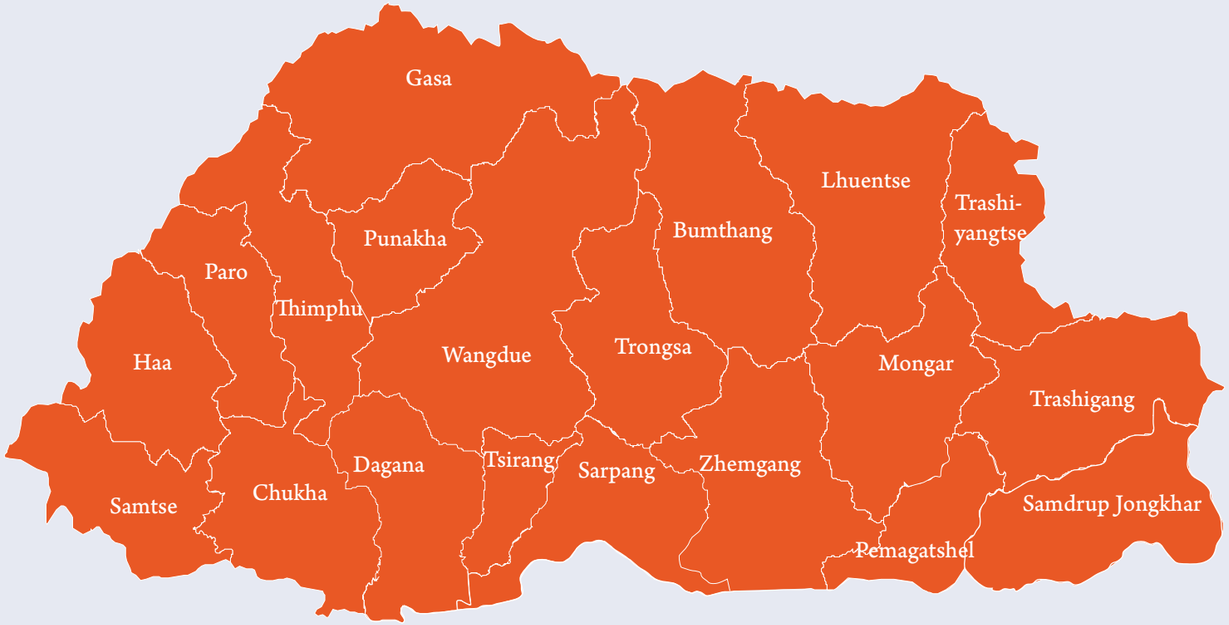
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TASHI DELEK

FACTS ABOUT BHUTAN





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.



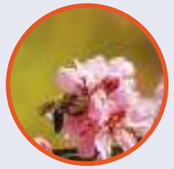
NATIONAL TREE

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 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 AIRLINE

Drukair, the 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 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.

Mindful Nation

Bhutan, a Haven for Travel

The world is full of awesome wonders. From the breathtaking Serengeti plains of East Africa teeming with wildlife, to the vast wonderous Buddhist complex of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the serene island atolls and coral reefs rich in marine life in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the historic cobblestone streets of towns and villages across Europe (to name just a few), there is no shortage of awesome destinations to travel to.

As someone who has spent many years in Bhutan, I am often asked about what makes the country unique, special or different from other travel locales on earth. Given the many choices available on our amazing blue planet, why should Bhutan be on the top of anyone's travel bucket list? People often ask, is it really as special and unique as travelers say? Is it worth making a trip to the Himalayan Kingdom, given the time it takes to get there and travel in the mountainous country? There are so many answers to this question. If you are on this Drukair flight reading this article on your way to or from Bhutan, you may already know the answer.

Often, just a glance at the striking photographs taken by photographers and travelers of its majestic landscapes, Buddhist architecture, cultural artefacts, and rich biodiversity, speak for themselves. Bhutan is unique in so many ways, and for so many reasons that are palpable even before landing in the country. Other reasons are more subtle and intangible. This makes it an alluring yet inspiring possibility for those who have never traveled to Bhutan. Without ever visiting in person, it is not so easy to grasp what it means to travel to a country nestled high in the Himalayan mountains, or a country that is also a culturally preserved locale, a tiny land-locked nation, an ecological sanctuary, and a haven for the practice of Vajrayana Buddhism, among many other things.

Nestled in the Himalayan Mountains

Bhutan is one of eight other countries making up the Himalayas, a vast mountainous region located within and surrounding the Tibetan Plateau. The region is also known as the Third Pole of the world because, after the Arctic and Antarctic polar caps, its mountain snow caps, glaciers and snowfields store more frozen water than anywhere else on the planet, creating an important global ecological zone. It is also famous for being home to 14 of the world's tallest mountain peaks above 8,000 meters above sea level (over 26,000 feet, for those following the imperial system).

The Himalayas includes other awesome destinations such as Northern India (including the former Himalayan Kingdoms of Ladakh and Sikkim), Nepal (home to six of seven tallest mountains in the world, including Mount Everest, Kangchenjunga, Lhotse, Mukalu, Cho Oyu and Dhualagiri I), Pakistan (home to K2, the second tallest and most difficult to climb mountain in the world), Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Among these amazing travel destinations, we return to the question, why choose Bhutan, the tiniest country in geographical size among them all?

Bhutan is home to the majestic snowcapped Himalayan mountains of Gangkhar Puensum (7,570 meters or 34,840 feet above sea level), Kula Kangri (7,538 meters, or 24,731 feet), Jomolhari (7,326 meters, or 24,035 feet), Tongshanjiabu (7,207 meters, or 23,645 feet) and Kangphu Kang (7,202 meters or 23,629 feet). What is truly amazing is that all of these mountains, without exception, are protected sites, where mountain climbing is not permitted. Think about this, the preservation of culture, biodiversity, mountain ecologies, protection of the environment, and spiritual beliefs centered on the sacredness of the mountains, is more important than the short-term revenue generated from climbing them. As other countries in the Himalayas know all too well, such revenue is short-sighted, given the massive amounts of garbage and human waste, as well as negative cultural and environmental impacts, and even human fatalities generated from such activities.

This wise, long-sighted vision of the Himalayan mountains, centered not on the short-sighted demands of passing visitors, but the needs of sentient beings as well as the people of Bhutan who believe the mountains are home to important deities and spirits, takes important precedence. There are only a few places in the world that I know of, where cultural and environmental preservation of critically important mountains takes precedence over the predatory hands of capitalism, or thrill seeking adventurers who want to "be the first" to conquer nature without regard to social, environmental or cultural effects of their actions. To understand this, is to begin to understand what makes Bhutan special.

Cultural Preservation

As I have written extensively elsewhere, Bhutan takes the preservation of cultural practices very seriously. This is obvious to travelers from the moment they board a plane heading to Bhutan, from the airline staff dressed in traditional dress to options of supplementing onboard meals with Bhutanese side dishes (try the ezay chili paste, for instance, or if available, *ema datshi*, the national dish made of chili with cheese). As traveler's fly into Bhutanese airspace, it is immediately evident from the landscapes below that





not only is its majestic historical architecture is intact, but contemporary architecture continues to uphold cultural principles of design and aesthetic. The airport itself follows Bhutanese architectural and interior design principles. It is very quickly apparent that landing in Bhutan is something special, and that does not always occur in other countries: an awareness that cultural preservation is on the top of the nation's mind, as well as its governance priorities and policy-making.

I often remember the poignant words of my colleague and friend, a well renown anthropologist from California specializing in the Tibet region, when she first visited Bhutan. She remarked that the county represented the last culturally preserved Himalayan Kingdom in the world. Indeed, this is evident everywhere. The importance placed on cultural preservation extends to material forms of culture, as well as its intangible forms. This is apparent to travelers visiting Bhutan, given the importance placed by Bhutanese women, men and youth on different types of traditional dress, dance, songs, cuisine, jewelry, and art forms that adorn their homes, shops and social meeting places (from statue-making and painting, to wooden, metal and other crafts). Also culturally prioritized is peace of mind. This is a country with no advertising billboards, no traffic lights, and no international fast food or fast fashion chains. Instead, there are free libraries, hiking trails, walking paths and social events such as music concerts and art exhibitions open to the public.

Some intangible cultural practices are a little harder to discern on short trips to Bhutan, while others may be more evident. These are called intangible, because they are only apparent in practice, or are symbolic in nature. They represent norms, beliefs, customs and practices that do not take material form, but are often symbolic or discernable through action. For instance, it is believed that when visiting Buddhist chortens (stupas), lhakhangs (temples), dzongs (fortress monasteries), statues and other sites, one must circumvent them in a clockwise direction, never anticlockwise. This custom extends to travelers visiting the nation, a sign of showing respect for indigenous knowledge and beliefs. Similarly, one must remove hats and sunglasses, and remain silent or speak quietly, when entering Buddhist temples and locales, as a sign of respect to worshipers, pilgrims and other visitors. Another custom involves refraining from entering, washing, swimming or throwing objects to bodies of water such as rivers, streams or lakes, as they are considered sacred. Another custom focuses on refraining from eating the last portion on a plate or serving, as is the accepted customary norm in the region.

What sets Bhutan apart from the rest of the region, is the unique and deep preservation of cultural practices on the one hand, and the incredible variation and diversity











of cultural practices, both material and intangible forms, across the otherwise geographically small country. That is not to say that the country is not changing. It is that change is happening at a considered pace, while the nation remains aware about prioritizing and celebrating aspects of culture that make Bhutan unique, and form the foundation of its very identity. This pride is impressively apparent from the moment one lands in the country, to the time when it is time to leave.

Ecological Sanctuary

Bhutan is made up of many nature sanctuaries, reserves and corridors, thus allowing wildlife to thrive and follow their natural migratory patterns. This means it prioritizes all sentient beings including those other than human. This is of central importance in a country that predominantly follows principles of Buddhism. With climate change, such efforts become more complex. As natural habitats change, this impacts the way wildlife search for food and shelter, and seek survival.

Bhutan is also the world's first carbon negative nation. That is, it absorbs more carbon than it emits. It did not contribute to climate change, but plays an important role in absorbing carbon emissions, including carbon emissions generated by climate polluting nations in the region and other parts of the world. This is made possible by strong environmentally and climate change friendly policies, such as the protection of forests and trees. On its approach to environmental conservation, Bhutan is recognized as a world leader.

As travelers fly or travel by road across Bhutan what is striking is the country's vast forest cover. According to estimates, approximately 72% of the nation is covered by forest. Its constitution specifically stipulates that at least 60% of the country must have forest cover into perpetuity. This is quite remarkable, given economic demands which would normally make it easy to succumb to predatory capitalist demands for deforestation as a short-sighted and environmental destructive modality of generating income in the short-term that have devastated other nations and indigenous cultural practices. Given the importance it places on environmental policies, there is so much to learn

from Bhutan. No trip would be complete without walking in its forests or in nature. Indeed, given most Buddhist monasteries are located on mountain tops or in nature, it becomes a vital part of any visit to the country.

Tiny but Mighty Land-Locked Nation

Returning to the question of what makes such principles and priorities possible and unique, it is hard not to notice that the country is sandwiched between two influencing giants, India to its South, and China to its adjacent North. In the face of large surrounding populations, globalization, social media pressure and acute economic pressure, how does the country stay true to its core principles of environmental and cultural preservation, for instance?

Bhutan choice of core policies, such as remaining dedicated to being carbon negative, plays a small but vital role in combatting climate change. Similarly, its dedication to cultural preservation, and social democratic policies of providing free health care, education and other services to its population, indicate a core commitment to serving its population. These have been achieved against external pressure and actors who regularly advise the country to do away with such commitments. However, this would mean succumbing to the short-sighted path that many other nations have taken. Bhutan has taken the harder path that seeks to balance equitable and sustainable socio-economic development with cultural and environmental preservation.

That the tiny land-locked nation of Bhutan often joins forces with other land-locked nations or small island nations in coming together to push for policies that push back against short-sighted policies that are environmentally, culturally and socially destructive, is not surprising. What is formidable, and incredibly intellectually stimulating for travelers is to consider that its choices sometimes go against the grain, while remaining rooted in its own core moral and cultural principles. There are two noteworthy examples.

Tourists traveling to Bhutan are aware that making travel arrangements are unique to the country. This is rooted in its belief of high value, low volume tourism. When traveling to various places in the world, it is hard not to notice that sometimes the nightly hotel room in itself surpasses the daily Sustainable Development Fee charged by the Royal Government of Bhutan. Consider on the one hand money paid to hotel chains, often owned by large hotel chains where its CEO's make billions of dollars in profit, versus money paid to a fee that serves the greater good, that ensures that children are educated, people are healthy and cared for, the population is provided services, and that its small population is not overwhelmed if not crushed by tourism. This in itself is ground-breaking.

The second example is its moral concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). First coined by His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in response to questions by a reporter about Bhutan's development path, to which He wisely stated that His country is more interested in GNH than GDP. Happiness over production. Something deeper and long-term, over something shallow and short-term. The moral concept of GNH guides Bhutan's constitution, governance and policy-making to a great extent. GNH is based on balancing economics, society, culture, the environment and good governance on an equal footing. But as many travelers will discover, it is a work in progress, with GNH being refined and nuanced as GNH surveys are undertaken at every five year interval, and as research and learnings are deepened within Bhutan and shared with the world at large.

Haven for Vajrayana Buddhism and Mindfulness

How has it been possible for Bhutan to take such an innovative, often ground-breaking path, one that is not confrontational but humble? Part of the answer lies in a nation that predominantly follows the philosophies and practices of Vajrayana Buddhism. What also makes Bhutan unique are the moral, religious, spiritual, cultural and environmental practices and beliefs of Buddhism, which are evident across most of Bhutan.

What is striking from the moment one first lands in Bhutan, are the colorful prayer flags that undulate in the wind while remaining bound to trees on the sides and tops of mountains and within its vast forests. Similarly, colorful and majestic Buddhist monasteries and lhakhangs and chortens stand majestically upon mountain and valley landscapes all over the country. There is something deeply emotive about the serenity of these sites. They provoke deep awe and respect, as well as reflection, contemplation and a meditative state of mind. They share one other common thing, for they mark sacred and auspicious Buddhist sites.

Buddhism is a not a commanding or all-demanding religion, but one that is inherently open. Its practices, such as meditation, or taking time and space to reflect in retreat, are open to others, regardless of religious beliefs. One does not have to take on everything, and can choose practices that work, without necessarily converting to Buddhism. In this sense, it is humble, open, caring and generous. It is this sense of humility, kindness, generosity and compassion that permeates into all other features of Bhutan, making it a travel haven like no other in the world. It is also what characterizes Bhutan at its best, and what draws travelers, tourists and pilgrims from all over the world to make the long but alluring journey to the last culturally and environmentally preserved Himalayan Kingdom in the clouds.

Towards Mindful Travel

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 the environment 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 and mindfulness. The majestic and auspicious mountains of Bhutan remain amazingly protected against the forces of modernity, as they should be. Foreign travelers too have a responsibility as visitors, 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 philosophical meaning and mindfulness. These environmentally and culturally 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 environmental and culturally rich spiritual setting providing an important haven for humans and all other sentient beings – 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

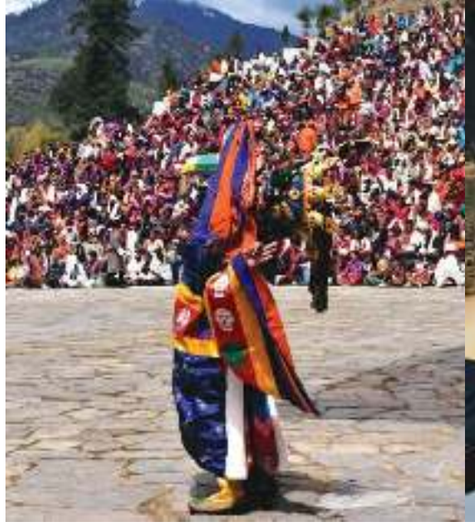







Paro Tschechu






With friends

FROM **GERMANY** TO THE **HIMALAYAS**

A Semester in Bhutan

Studying, Exploring, and Playing Soccer at 2,600 meters


Hiking in the Himalayas




Royal Thimphu College





In 2025, I completed my degree in International Business. When I look back on the past three years, one experience stands out above all others: my semester abroad at the Royal Thimphu College (RTC) in Bhutan. It was not only the highlight of my studies, but one of the most unique and enriching experiences of my life.

From mid-February to the end of June 2024, I had the extraordinary opportunity to study in a country I had barely heard of before meeting Sangay and Pempa in a lecture room in Ravensburg, Germany, in 2022. At the time, I could never have imagined that soon I would be at their college, welcomed into their homes and traditions.

A Warm Welcome

From the very beginning, my time in Bhutan was shaped by an exceptional sense of hospitality. The staff of the International Relations Office at RTC and the entire college welcomed us, the three German and three American international students with remarkable kindness and attentiveness. The first two weeks were carefully planned, with a comprehensive onboarding program that helped us settle in. We even had sessions on mindfulness with the Vice President of RTC.

At first, some cultural differences left us international students confused, but over the semester, conversations with locals, shared reflections, and lectures on Bhutanese culture gradually brought clarity. Buddhism shapes everyday life in Bhutan. The following moments capture traces of this way of life.

What Daily Life in Bhutan Taught Me: Three Lessons

Community First

Bhutanese society is strongly collectivist, in contrast to German society, which tends to be more individualistic. For example, when I sat alone at lunch, both familiar and unfamiliar students would often join me and ask, “Have you made friends?” Initially, this made me doubt myself — had I really not found friends yet? After talking with other international students, I realized they had been asked the same question. It wasn’t a concern about social

status, but genuine care for our well-being. Bhutanese students spend time most in groups. The group holds great importance, and everyone is looked after, even those who are still strangers.

The Joy of Giving

Generosity is a quality that stood out to me. My Bhutanese college friends and yoga teachers embodied this perfectly. They welcomed me into their free time, took me to beautiful places, and patiently shared their knowledge of their way of life. Despite my insistence, they paid for meals. Rita, a local friend, once invited all the international students to her home for a home-cooked meal. Sangay's mother gifted me a carpet I had admired, and Pema surprised me with a handmade basket from another region — simply because they remembered I had been searching for this one.

Kindness in the Moment

The helpfulness of the locals left a lasting impression on me. While hiking with Tshering, night fell and we didn't know where to stay. A passing monk, on the way to town, offered to help and handed us the key to his house. What



Group of international students in Punakha



Playing football with RTC FC





Farewell with RTC FC





Excursion to Paro Taktsang

was meant to be a single night in a stranger's home became two, filled with trust, compassion, generosity and spontaneity. We stayed in a house with a breathtaking view above the clouds in the middle of nature.

My Highlight: From Grassroots Football in Germany to Bhutan's Women's National League

When I heard that RTC has a women's football team, I casually thought I'd bring my boots and join training sessions. I never expected that decision would lead me to compete in Bhutan's Women's National League — as the first European player — and open the door to unforgettable connections and personal growth.

Training was intense, up to six times a week, sometimes at 6 a.m. before lectures and in the evenings. What started as "just kicking the ball and meeting new people" quickly became a challenge that pushed the whole team beyond their comfort zone. Since I had just joined, training had to be conducted in English instead of Dzongkha. Yet, with gestures and shared passion, language was never a barrier. Playing football at 2,600 meters above sea level was tough, and the players were clearly more skilled than I was. Still, the team believed in me — giving me the chance to receive an official FIFA transfer as a guest player for RTC FC.

The club welcomed me wholeheartedly: training gear, boots, a water bottle, and even a personalized jersey. Although I was only there for one semester and sometimes missed sessions due to studies and travel, RTC FC treated me as a full member of the team. With RTC FC, our pre-match ritual of praying at the campus altar showed how deeply Buddhism shapes everyday life in Bhutan.

My first match in the capital stadium of Thimphu was unforgettable. The team trusted me enough to put me in the starting eleven. Walking onto the pitch to the national anthem felt surreal — like a movie scene. Nervous but determined, I gave everything, and after just 15 minutes, I scored a goal. Friends and fellow international students had made posters and cheered. With a few more goals, we won the match and my family in Germany could even watch the live stream.

Over the season, I played several more matches and traveled to different parts of Bhutan with the team. Long bus rides and training sessions became moments of laughter, conversation and bonding. At the end of my stay, the team surprised me with a farewell cake. We sang, laughed and shared a few tears together.

Carrying Bhutan With Me

These four and half months were an unforgettable journey, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who made this adventure so special. Bhutan taught me not only about a different culture and GNH, but also about the joy of simple moments and the power of meaningful relationships. It definitely changed me in subtle ways. What I've shared here is just a glimpse of the lessons learned and friendships I carry from Bhutan.

Kadinche la, Bhutan
With love and best wishes
Selina



SELINA BAUMANN

She lives in the south of Germany. In 2024, from Februray to June, as part of her dual study program in International Business at DHBW Ravensburg, she studied at Royal Thimphu College. She currently works in sales within the automotive industry and is a certified yoga teacher. She is a curious and open-minded person, passionate about traveling, nature, football, photography, and yoga.

BHUTAN'S **BEASTIE** BOYS

The top half of Bhutan is really cold. Not charmingly cold. Not the kind of cold that encourages scarves and snow men. It is the kind of cold that effects how everything lives, moves, eats, and survives. Glaciers edge the mountains. Grass grows where it can. And scattered across this landscape are yaks—large, steady animals that appear as though they were designed by a committee tasked with solving the problem of cold once and for all.

Alongside the yaks are the people who tend them: herders and their families, living part of the year in valleys and part of the year in high pastures, in tents mostly made of woven yak hair. Yak hair is waterproof, which is not a luxury in Bhutan's highlands but a requirement. Nothing decorative survives long there.

Yaks are bovines, related to cows and buffalo, though buffalo couldn't survive in these conditions and cows wouldn't even consider it. Yaks were domesticated about 5,000 years ago in the mountains of what is now western China. They were not brought down into more temperate places, because temperate places didn't suit them. Instead, they stayed where the air is thin, the winters are long, and very few animals can compete.

They remain, to this day, cold-weather specialists.

Yaks live at elevations between 10,000 and 18,000 feet. They migrate seasonally, moving between grazing areas so the grass has time to recover. Their grazing grounds are designated by a centuries-old code by the generations of families that tend the same herds, following routes that are older than roads and more reliable than maps. In winter, herders move south, where there is less snow. In summer, they head north to high plains that briefly turn green. The rhythm is practical and patient. No one rushes a yak— or a yak herder.

Physically, yaks are built for altitude. They have large lungs and strong hearts that handle thin air. Their hooves are smaller and more compact than those of cows, which [illegible] uneven ground. They are not fast, but they are sure-footed, which in the mountains is better. If you had to hop from [illegible] at 15,000 feet, you'd probably also want small hoo[illegible]

Both male and female yaks have horns, which [illegible] outward in a way that suggests decoration but [illegible] about survival. Their long outer hair hangs nearly to the ground, while underneath is a soft, insulating layer that traps warmth. Yaks do not sweat much, which [illegible] sweating would be a terrible idea in the cold. [illegible] When temperatures rise, the [illegible] designed for warmth. Some [illegible] their yak when it gets warmer.

For the people who live with them, [illegible] ways that are brilliant in their completeness. Milk, meat, butter, cheese, wool, hides, bones, [illegible] little is wasted. Yak dung is dried and burned for heat, especially above the tree line, where fire [illegible] yaks not.







exist. Bones are carved into buttons and tools. Hair is spun into rope, clothing, blankets, and tents. This is not a lifestyle choice. It's just how things work.

Yak milk is rich and high in protein, and yak cheese is a staple food in Bhutan's high regions. One common form is *chugo*, a hard, dried cheese cut into cubes and sold in small plastic bags. You do not bite into chugo unless you are trying to break your teeth. You put it in your mouth and wait. Eventually, it get's milky coating and softens. This can take hours. It is popular with children, adults, and, according to some of my friends, American dogs. This seems plausible.

Yak cheese is also used if available for *ema datsi*, Bhutan's national dish of chili and cheese. The chilies are serious. The cheese is not decorative. Together, they form something warming, filling, and very Bhutanese. People eat this daily without commentary, which suggests that suffering is relative.

Haa, in western Bhutan, has more yaks than people. It is the least populated of Bhutan's 20 dzongkhags, or districts. Haa is also the name of the main town, so letters addressed there read: Haa, Haa.

The district covers much of Bhutan's western flank and includes a series of broad valleys surrounded by high mountains, many rising between 14,000 and 20,000 feet. These elevations are ideal for yaks and less appealing to almost everything else. Grass grows well in the summer months, and yak spend most of their time eating it. They consume about three percent of their body weight in grass each day, which is a lot, though less than a cow would need. Yaks are efficient. They have learned to do more with less, which is another reason they have lasted.

Most visitors to Bhutan never see a yak. They live far above the towns, in places without roads. This is also why yak products, especially cheese, are difficult to produce in large quantities. Yaks are not farmed in fields or barns. They graze freely, and they do not adjust their schedules for markets.

In Haa, some people decided to try anyway. A friend told me a great story about a program in Haa where Italian cheesemakers partnered with locals to make yak cheese that could be produced more consistently and, possibly, exported. The idea was sensible. The execution was complicated. In summer, when yaks are grazing in high northern pastures, it can take days for people on foot to bring milk down to the town. Milk, as it turns out, does not enjoy long journeys at altitude.

The solution was not to build roads, which would take years and alter the land, but to buy drones. The drones fly milk from the high pastures to the processing facility in under an hour. They also carry bull semen back and forth, which is necessary for breeding in such isolated terrain. This is not something the Bhutanese advertise, but it works.

The presence of drones in this landscape feels less strange than it sounds. Bhutan has always adapted to difficult geography with whatever tools are available. The mountains do not reward nostalgia. They reward competence.

What does worry herders is climate change. As temperatures rise, glaciers retreat and snow cover becomes less reliable. Grasslands change. In others, water sources dry up earlier in the season. Warmer temperatures also bring insects and diseases that yaks are not accustomed to.

As the climate warms, yak must move higher to stay comfortable, but there is a limit to how high one can go. Mountains eventually run out. For herders, this means longer migrations, fewer good pastures, and more uncertainty. It also means that a way of life shaped over centuries is being forced to adjust quickly. It's not easy.

Still, yaks remain. They stand in the wind. They chew grass slowly. They wait. Bhutan, for its part, continues to make careful choices, balancing tradition, technology, and restraint. There is no rush to turn yak into an industry. The goal is continuity, not growth.

Yaks are not symbols. They are not mascots. They are working animals in a difficult place, living alongside people who understand that survival is not dramatic. It is repetitive. It involves weather, patience, and paying attention.

In Bhutan's highlands, the yak is not impressive because it is rare or exotic. It is impressive because it stays.



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.



When The Guru Departs, Color Fades

For two weeks I have woken to the silhouette of a large potted plant, its leaves etched against the pale morning light. Today, reluctant to leave the warmth of my sleeping bag, I linger, tracing its shape with my eyes. What begins as raw awareness soon gives way to perception, and I find myself wondering how this oversized piece of foliage came to be in a monastery tucked away in such a remote village.

I notice the direction my thoughts have taken and stop. Why do we humans chase reasons, pressing the world to bend to our logic, or assuming a divine plan? Why must a river flow or a tree grow? They simply do, without striving, without thought. No hidden design, no divine intention.

As a haiku by the Zen priest Ryokan reflects:

The wind blows,
The grass bends
That's all

As I rise, I am aware that today is the final day of the empowerment ritual that has spanned two weeks. The thought stirs a pang of sadness, and everything feels heavier, edged with finality: the long wait in the toilet line and the choice of patience over peeing in the bushes; the slow walk toward the event tent; the cold yet flavourful *roti* from the night before, dipped in peanut butter for lunch; and the oily, but satisfying paneer dish served at dinner in one of the makeshift corrugated-steel eateries feeding the thousands gathered here — yogis from the mountains, villagers from nearby valleys, patrons from the capital, and foreign guests.

The event space is especially crowded today. Torn cardboard and scraps of clothing stretch far beyond the gate, marking improvised seats. I find mine and settle in, gazing at the backs of monks' heads, now so familiar I could sketch them from memory.

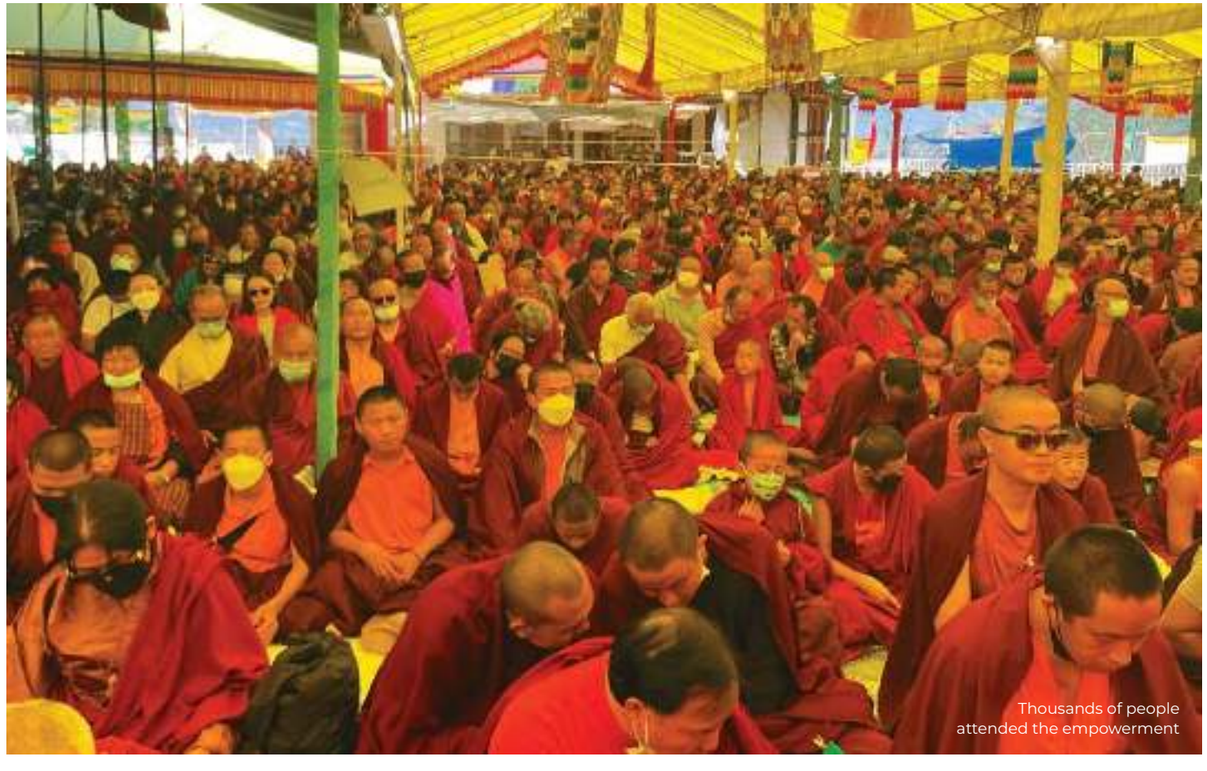
Rain grows heavy, lashing the canopy and threatening to break through its thin nylon roof. Along the edges, people huddle beneath umbrellas, bound together by devotion. The resilience of the Bhutanese in situations like this is striking: no complaint, no urge to leave, only the wish to remain close to the guru and receive blessings.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, the presiding vajra master and our root teacher, enters. Silence ripples outward like a wave. Those with space stand; the rest of us express our respect in other ways. In Vajrayana Buddhism, which employs direct and powerful methods to awaken students to the truth, the guru is not merely a teacher but the very heart of the path.

He or she is honored as a living Buddha, not through blind faith, but as a deliberate means to dismantle ego-fixation. Devotion functions as a blade that cuts through self-clinging, opening the mind beyond its habitual patterns. With precision, the guru points directly to the nature of mind itself.



People entering the event venue



Thousands of people attended the empowerment



People walking to the makeshift eateries at the end of the day

As trust ripens into stable confidence, the practitioner recognises that the awakened qualities perceived in the guru were never external, but a reflection of their own primordially pure nature of mind. At this turning point, devotion turns inward and dissolves into direct realisation of the timeless truth that was always present.

Chanting rises and falls in soft waves. I miss my morning coffee — Kencho, our friendly coffee-wala, has returned to Thimphu, and my cheerful Rajasthani neighbour, Surbhi, has moved closer to the exit. Shutterbug, the event's official photographer, is packing up, while the ever-patient guardians of peace and local police slip into a mode of gentle facilitation, preparing the dispersal. The mood has shifted. Everything carries a faint edge of transience, as though the moment itself is dissolving into the rain.

Colored rice is distributed among the devotees and tossed forward as an offering. I'm faintly amused when several grains land on the monk in front of me, clinging stubbornly to his unusually flat head. I muse that he would be well suited for sirsasana — the yoga headstand pose.

The day moves quickly. Rinpoche leaves his seat. The tulkus gather sacred objects, and the daily procession begins. Each of us receives a blessing as the items are swiftly passed over our heads. As Rinpoche draws nearer, the atmosphere subtly transforms: weary faces brighten into smiles, backs straighten, and necks crane in hope of getting closer. As often happens, Rinpoche pauses to tease me with a familiar remark: "How is Swansea City doing?"

It's an inside joke: a nod to a film Rinpoche directed


Dinner - paneer curry with roti

in 2023, in which I had a small role, walking around a lamppost dressed as an Indian pandita (scholar), chanting "Barcelona 0 – Swansea City 4." The memory makes me smile, adding a playful layer to the ritual.

Across the way, a young Chinese woman appears each day in a new, flamboyant outfit. Rinpoche inevitably stops to comment on her attire, and she is visibly delighted, her smile lingering long after he has returned to his seat. I find myself wondering about her life in urban China. Does she dress like this there? What do her parents think?

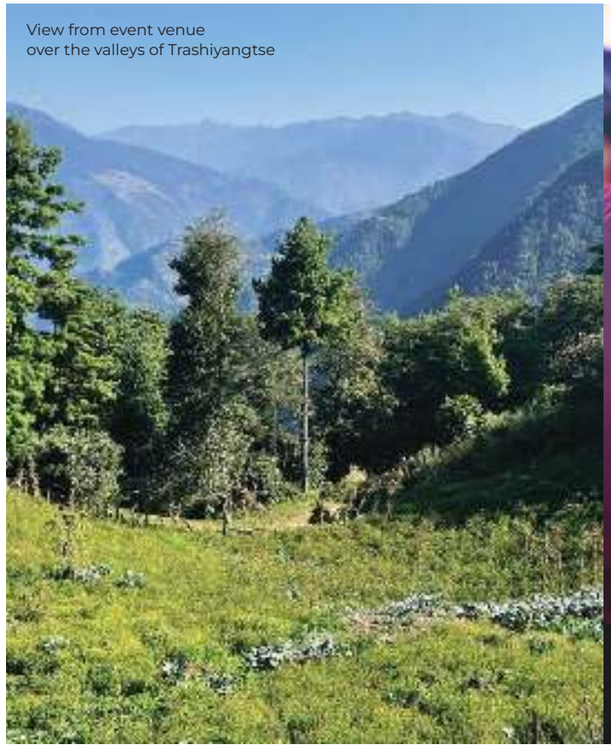
She catches me looking, and I raise two thumbs to show my appreciation of her clothing. She responds with a polite but expressionless nod. Perhaps we shared a brief connection in a former life. Maybe I was her clothing designer in the Qing dynasty. Who knows?

A friend from Thimphu passes by, waving in my direction and breaking my wandering train of thought. I return to the chanting. From the outside, events like these can seem daunting: two weeks in confined spaces, legs barely able to stretch for hours, nights spent on thin mattresses or in makeshift tents.

Yet the space is alive with a vibrant energy, invisible to the casual eye. It is something that transcends logic, like the plaintive breath of a shakuhachi or duduk, or sunlight filtering through a forest, moments that resist explanation yet touch our timeless awareness.

The chanting falls silent. The two-week empowerment has finally drawn to a close. Rinpoche rises to leave. In a flash of red, he is gone. Yet we linger, reluctant to move, as if the sacred imprints need time to settle into our mindstream.

Faces around me appear vacant, almost stunned. Rinpoche — vivid, wise, compassionate, and fully present — always leaves behind a palpable absence. A Taiwanese lady once captured the essence of these moments perfectly: "When Rinpoche departs," she said, "it


View from event venue
over the valleys of Trashiyangtse


Kencho serving coffee to Rinpoche


Yogi enjoying dinner in makeshift eatery


Young Chinese lady wearing
flamboyant costume

is as though the color has drained from the scene, leaving everything in black and white."

I watch the crowd disperse, the foreign guests soon returning to cities like Taipei, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. As they travel, they will merge into the flow of airports and train stations, outwardly indistinguishable from other travelers, yet they are different. They carry Rinpoche's blessings and the indelible imprint of the empowerment — a living thread stretching back to the great fifteenth-century treasure revealer Pema Lingpa, who first disclosed this practice.

Who would imagine that a Bhutanese village in remote Trashiyangtse could become a generator of wisdom radiating outward through the minds of those gathered here, touching lives across Asia's vast economic and cultural powerhouses?

I gather my belongings and look for my ride. My plan to return to Thimphu by way of Assam has fallen through; there are no seats available on the bus for days. Instead, I will travel with a tulku friend, spending a few nights en-route in the small, sacred town of Jakar.

As I wait, huddled in a corner to escape the rain, I spot a yogi I met earlier at a makeshift eatery. He spends most of his life in retreat in the mountains, coming down only for medical visits and for empowerments such as this one. His manner suggests a deep familiarity with the Dharma, and I feel both glad and inspired to see him again. I slip him a small offering, which he tries to refuse. I tell him it is for local wine or coffee, whatever he prefers. Smiling, I add, "In case you get too attached to austerity." We both laugh.

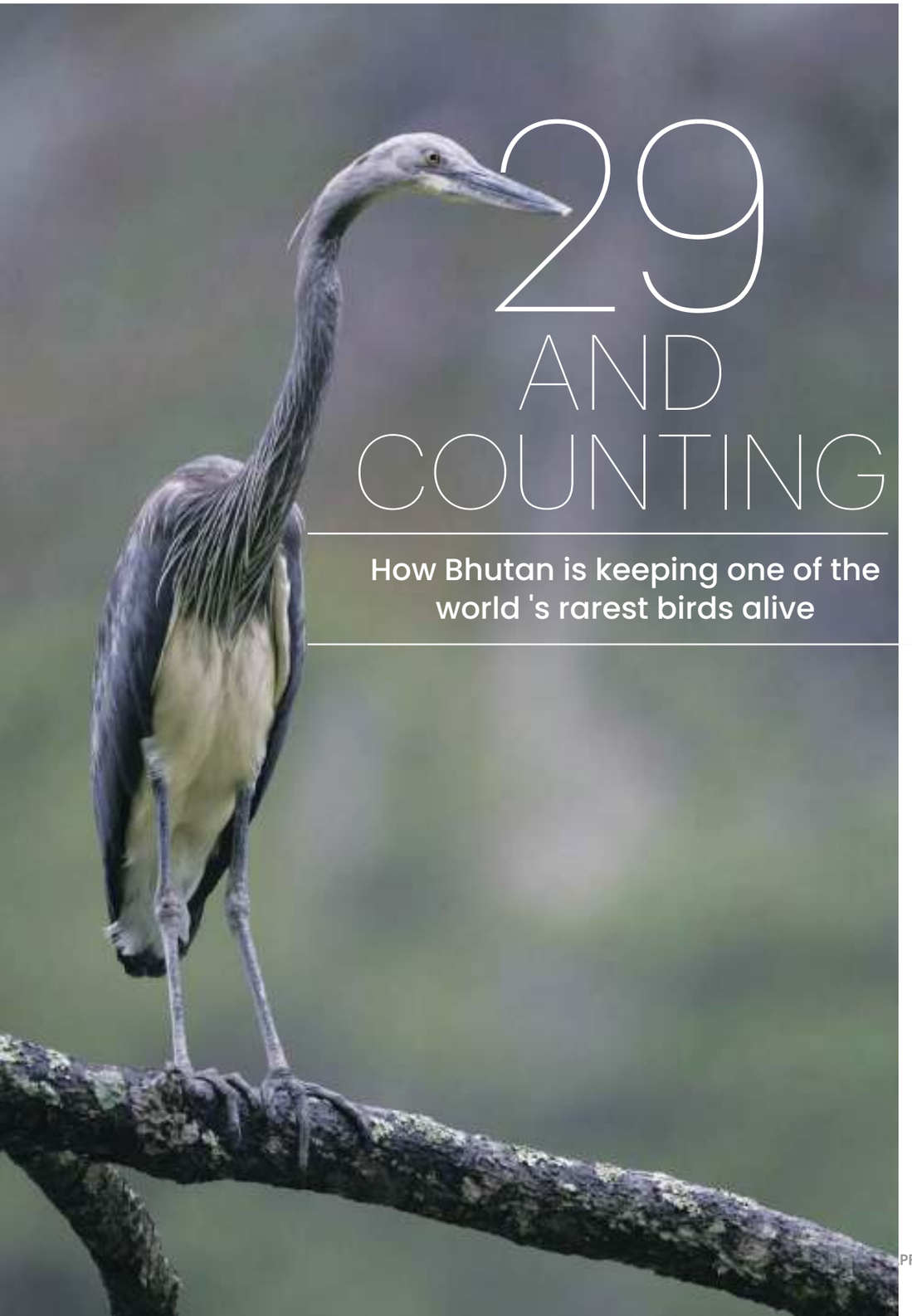
My ride arrives, and we set off. Even the thought of a hot shower and pizza in Jakar, which will feel like Tokyo compared to this small village, does nothing to dispel the sadness I feel at leaving, at knowing the empowerment has ended.

But this, too, as the Buddha taught, is the nature of compounded things: they arise, they endure briefly, and they fall apart. Nothing remains constant, not even for a moment. The empowerment has ended, and like everything else, it has come together and now dissolved. This reminder of impermanence is the final lesson I will take with me as I leave. I am profoundly grateful to Rinpoche and the village community.



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.



29 AND COUNTING

How Bhutan is keeping one of the world 's rarest birds alive

November 14, Tingtibi, Zhemgang— On the morning of the final day of the Bhutan Bird Festival, the festival grounds have transformed into a lively treasure-hunt arena. Children and villagers laugh as they lean into the excitement while a commentator announces the day's challenge: find the egg of Chubja Pho Karp—the White-bellied Heron.

He pauses dramatically, then begins to recount what every birder in Bhutan knows by heart: the White-bellied Heron (WBH), Ardea insignis, is one of the world's rarest birds—fewer than 60 remain, and Bhutan is home to almost half the global population. Somewhere among these festival grounds lies its "egg", a playful reminder of something far harder to find in the real world.

Within minutes, someone shouts triumphantly. The dummy egg is lifted high, and applause washes through the crowd.

If only finding one in the wild were this easy.

Zhemgang's Bhutan Bird Festival—held annually to celebrate the birth anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and honor his visionary conservation leadership—turns this biodiverse district into a lively pilgrimage site for bird lovers once every year. Villagers sell local produce, school groups perform and researchers share stories.

But beneath the music, food stalls, and forest walks, the festival carries a gentle warning.

The WBH, Zhemgang's star attraction, is slipping toward extinction. Sensitive to the slightest human disturbance, nesting alone, and vulnerable to riverine change and predation, the species struggles to rebuild its population in the wild. With so few individuals, inbreeding threatens the genetic health of future generations.

Experts have long said that if left entirely on its own, the WBH may vanish by 2050.

Bhutan, however, is not letting it disappear quietly.

A glimpse along the river

Inside a biodiversity information tent at the festival, a Zhemgang forest official shows the video he recorded earlier that morning. A crystal clear video plays: a tall, charcoal-grey heron standing still as stone on a riverbank in Berti, filmed just that morning. After feeding, it raises its long neck and surveys the water, regal and solitary.

This is often the closest the public comes to the bird whose image graces posters, signboards, and even the name of the nearby WBH Ecolodge in Berti, a community-run haven for travelers hoping to catch a rare sighting along the Mangdechhu.

Spotting a WBH in person is a privilege few experience.

They haunt remote stretches of rivers—Punatsangchhu, Mangdechhu, lower Wangchhu—preferring freshwater rivers and wetlands up to 2,000 meters above sea level. A true piscivore, the heron lives almost entirely on fish. Even the sound of a distant footstep can send it lifting into the mist.

A year of hope

For more than a decade, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) has been at the heart of the WBH survival—tracking birds across remote river valleys, restoring riverine habitats, engaging communities, and nurturing rescued eggs and chicks through its ex-situ breeding programme at the White-bellied Heron Conservation Centre (WBHCC). Their work blends science, field grit, and local stewardship, forming Bhutan's most comprehensive effort to save the species.

In March last year, this long commitment showed a hopeful sign. RSPN's annual population survey recorded 29 individuals, up from 25 in 2024. Of these, 24 live in the wild, while five are currently being raised at the WBHCC

For any other species, an increase of four might seem insignificant. For the WBH, it is a milestone.

The survey team—traversing 17 habitat zones across Bhutan using drones, satellite imagery, and handheld Epicollect5 mapping tools—found the highest concentration in Zone III: the middle Punatsangchhu, Burichhu, Sunkosh–Dagachhu, and Wakletar. Here alone, nine birds were counted, six more than last year.

Four active nests were documented, three along Punatsangchhu and one in Mangdechhu, where two chicks were found in a carefully constructed nest near Tsaidang. These fragments of good news are enough to keep hope alive.

But the data also warns us: some crucial habitats recorded no sightings last year, including the upper Punatsangchhu and much of Mangdechhu—the very places that once sheltered the species.

Where science meets survival

Two hours' drive south of Wangdue, a steep turn near the Tsirang–Dagana junction leads to Chachey Dovan. It is quiet here—lush valleys drenched in humidity, ridges washed in the green of untouched forest, and no settlement in sight.

This is where the WBHCC stands—a sanctuary built not just of steel and mesh, but of urgency.

Surrounded by silence and heat ideal for the species, the centre exists because experts warned that the heron may not survive in the wild without human help. The goal is bold but simple: secure an ex-situ gene pool and





eventually release healthy, genetically diverse individuals back to their ancestral rivers.

What began with two aviaries now houses five herons, with improved facilities and new aviaries added since earlier years. Two of the residents are juveniles, raised from wild-collected eggs and chicks rescued in 2024.

Inside the main aviary—a vast circular enclosure draped in green mesh—trees and bushes mimic riverine forest. A meandering artificial stream, fed with fingerlings, allows the birds to hunt naturally. An artificial nest sits nestled among branches, a quiet symbol of hope.

But WBHCC is more than a breeding facility. In an airy exhibition hall for visitors, who can come to learn the heron's story, there are life-cycle posters, preserved wings and feathers, a model heron, and even a complete skeleton displayed in glass. A screen plays CCTV footage of wild mating behaviour, nest building, and rare glimpses of captive breeding.

Guardians of the herons

Saving the WBH is far from a desk job. RSPN's field teams venture into harsh terrain—untamed forests, rocky ravines, and river gorges rarely visited by people—often comparing their assignments to survival expeditions, only with cameras and simple biscuits for lunch.

Trekking for days or even weeks, encountering fresh tiger tracks, climbing cliffs, wading through swelling rivers, and camping in remote sites have become routine for them. Their work spans every corner of the heron's fragile world: surveying nests, cataloguing habitats, monitoring water quality, tracking feeding grounds, and rescuing eggs or chicks when the wild proves too dangerous.

RSPN works closely with riverine communities, raising awareness about the heron's sensitivity, restoring degraded riverbanks, protecting fish habitats, supporting eco-friendly livelihoods, strengthening community-run ecolodges, and promoting nature-based solutions that help people and wildlife thrive together. It is conservation rooted in partnership—villagers, foresters, youth groups, monks, and fishermen—because the survival of WBH is inseparable from the wellbeing of the people who share its rivers.

Why saving WBH matters

Standing over a meter tall, the WBH is the largest heron in the world and among the rarest. Its presence signals the health of entire river systems—clean water, intact forests, balanced fish populations. When the WBH thrives, it tells us that rivers still run free and wild.

But hydropower development, riverbank degradation, sand mining, and increasing human disturbance are shrinking its habitat. Solitary by nature, it needs space—quiet, undisturbed stretches of riverbanks that are disappearing fast.

To lose the WBH is to lose more than a bird. It is to lose a piece of river magic, a thread of Himalayan wilderness, and a species found today in only Bhutan, India, and Myanmar (now extinct from Nepal and Bangladesh). In Bhutan, its survival is tied closely to the national identity of living in harmony with nature.





A future held gently in human hands

As twilight falls over Tingtibi and the final festival dancers take the stage, the story of the dummy egg takes on a new meaning. Finding an egg may be a game, but saving the heron is not.

Last year's rise to 29 herons is a victory but a fragile one. Bhutan's commitment, RSPN's relentless work, and the compassion of local communities are what keep this bird alive.

The WBH remains elusive, quiet, solitary, living on the edges of our rivers and just barely on the edge of existence.

But in Bhutan, at least, it is not alone.

It is watched, protected, and hoped for.

And somewhere along Punatsangchhu or Mangdechhu tonight, a tall, dark figure may be standing still in the moonlit water—unknown to most of the world, but cherished deeply by the few who refuse to let it disappear.

WBH photos by Yeshey Dorji



YANGYEL LHADEN

A journalist with Kuensel since 2020, she specialises in environment, conservation, climate change, and green energy reporting, while also covering women, children, and vulnerable communities. She is an awardee of Covering Climate Now, recognized as Emerging Journalists of the Year, and has received the Annual Journalism Award for Best Feature Story and the South Asia Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity.

Manas River Lodge

Bhutan's First Fishing Lodge opens to the World

Himalayan Bhutan is a kingdom of towering mountains, arid alpine plains, coniferous forests, deciduous jungles and rapidous rivers. Remarkably, the country's topography descends from 7,570 meters (24,836 feet) above sea level on its northern border with Tibet to a lowly 97 meters (318 feet) on its shared southern border with India. Over the course of this roughly 150 kilometers (90 miles), three climatic zones are encountered including the northernmost Alpine Zone, the centrally-located Temperate Zone and the Subtropical Zone spanning the southern reaches of the kingdom. This ecological transition results in a diversity of flora and fauna that is utterly unique within the Himalayas.

Such environmental diversity offers visitors to the kingdom exceptional opportunities to experience a wide range of recreational eco-tourism options. In a single visit, tourists can enjoy multi-day treks through the high alpine, day hikes through blossoming rhododendron forests, wildlife viewing and bird watching of hundreds of endemic forest and jungle species and, since its introduction in 2023, catch-and-release flyfishing for Bhutan's iconic piscine species, the Golden and Chocolate Mahseer.

With the recent adoption of Bhutan's novel Recreational Angling Policy approved by Parliament in 2022 and initiated in March of 2023 with an expedition lead by Thimphu-based Himalayan Flyfishing Adventures, recreational angling has exploded in the kingdom. Initial revenues in 2023 and 2024 resulting from fishing permit fees contributed Nu3.236 million to Bhutan's economy with collateral income generated by tour operators, lodgings providers, food and beverage suppliers, fishing equipment sales and logistical service professionals contributing substantially more. All in all, Bhutan's burgeoning recreational fishing industry is becoming significant and sustainable business based on smart and proactive conservation-based angling policies.

The global angling tourism sector accounts for upwards of US$190 billion annually with continuing growth year over year. Importantly, conservation-related funds which are generated through taxes, permit fees and private donations by anglers amount to several billion US dollars annually benefitting the riverine species, ecosystems and human populations that depend on them in profound and meaningful ways.

Manas River Lodge, Bhutan's first angling-specific lodge which opened in October of 2025, is situated on the banks of the southern kingdom's Mangde Chhu river and serves as a testament to the viability and early success of the kingdom's new recreational angling policy. Located within the boundaries of Royal Manas National Park, Manas River Lodge is the result of an international partnership between Bhutanese and American pescatourism professionals who share the vision of providing high-quality flyfishing experiences to the international angling market.

Anglers and non-angling guests who visit Manas River Lodge are treated to a guest service experience that is unique among international angling destinations. Manas River Lodge is managed by Nawang Tenzin, formerly of the Aman Resorts, one of the world's most highly respected five-star hospitality service providers. Nawang Tenzin has implemented a similar level of guest service throughout the lodge from the food and beverage team to the lodge's service staff to the talented rafting and fishing guides, a guest service-focused philosophy which permeates the entire operation with visceral and visible effect.

The location of Manas River Lodge's riverside property is breathtaking. Flowing pristinely past the private bungalow compound is the famed Mangdechhu



river [illegible] promise of the power [illegible] golden [illegible] Mahseer [illegible] spiritual and [illegible] legendary Mahseer. [illegible] Nestled [illegible] has regional [illegible] private riverside encampment are [illegible] tropical [illegible] foothills, replete with hundreds of bird species, including the critically endangered White-bellied Heron, [illegible] Hornbill, primates such as the Golden [illegible] Langur, large mammals including elephants, [illegible] buffalo, [illegible] deer and [illegible] felines including [illegible] leopards, [illegible] golden [illegible] cat, and the endangered Bengal tiger [illegible] others.

[illegible] centrally located, elevated riverside lounge [illegible] dining outside, deck or on the porches of [illegible] rows designed in traditional Bhutanese [illegible] artistry and to enjoy views of the [illegible] Chuu [illegible] crystal [illegible] spiritual crossing into [illegible] 200 [illegible] angling [illegible] options [illegible] and [illegible] birding [illegible] the Natural [illegible] tours of local [illegible] temples [illegible] on the Drangme Chhu and Manas Chhu rivers [illegible] as a short drive [illegible] Phibsoo Wildlife Center located near the Bhutan-India border.

Transportation to Manas River Lodge can be accomplished through domestic air travel from Paro International Airport to either Gelephu or Bumthang airports or by privately chartered helicopter transport which is organized and secured by Nawang Tenzin and his team of service specialists. In each case, travelers will feature immersive experiences within Royal Manas National Park, a gem of the kingdom's spectacular National Park system.

In regard to the future of Manas River Lodge and other recreation-focused businesses in the southern kingdom, the development of the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC), located five hours by vehicle from the lodge, promises to have a significant impact. The GMC is the vision of His Majesty the King, and is being developed as a Special Administrative Region within the kingdom to serve as a model for development that balances economic growth, spiritual well-being and environmental harmony.

The GMC spans approximately 4,000 square kilometers and estimates suggest that the future population may grow upwards of one million Bhutanese and international residents. With such a significant influx of inhabitants, the demand for outdoor-related recreation services promises to be a boon to businesses [illegible]

This growth will require thoughtful and [illegible] policy [illegible] natural resources [illegible] for which Bhutan [illegible] for decades. Maintaining [illegible] coverage [illegible] throughout the kingdom [illegible] Constitution [illegible]









benefits of conserving healthy ecosystems for the well-being of Bhutan's ecology and her people.

As the world's only carbon-negative country and a longtime leader in global environmental initiatives, Bhutan must once again rise to the challenge of ever-changing climatological realities and the results of increasing human impact. If the kingdom's environmental philosophy and policies of the past are indicative of its future approach, it appears that Bhutan is well-equipped to move forward in a sustainable and environmentally-sensitive way, managing its resources in the face of such substantial change.

Bhutan, referred to by many international anglers as "Flyfishing's New Frontier", is only now garnering the international spotlight for its unique and high-quality angling opportunities. However, its identity as a profoundly spiritual and breathtakingly beautiful destination is hardly new. In fact, the Thunder Dragon Kingdom, as it is commonly known, is regularly featured among the world's top travel destinations in well-known publications including the New York Times, Travel and Leisure magazine and many others.

For travelers who wish to experience this modern day Shangri-la with a flyrod, Manas River Lodge now offers the kingdom's first venue from which to enjoy such adventurous and exciting angling opportunities. Combined with a level of guest service that is unequalled in the international angling market, Bhutan's first fishing lodge stands to serve as a leader in the ever-growing global pescatourism industry, directly aligned with the kingdom's priorities of high value, low volume tourism while promoting conservation-based stewardship of Bhutan's fish and fisheries for all the world to see.



BRYANT DUNN

He is the International Director of Dunn Outfitting International and Himalayan Flyfishing Adventures in Thimphu. He also serves as the Fly Fishers International Ambassador to Bhutan. He can be reached at dunnoutfitting@gmail.com.

THE POWER OF A GAZE

DURING ANNUAL FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN BHUTAN, SACRED CLOTHS – INTRICATELY WOVEN AND EMBROIDERED – ARE UNFURLED. WHAT IS THEIR SIGNIFICANCE TO THE BELIEVER?

Even before dawn, monks in maroon red robes carried on their shoulders a heavy roll of cloth, dozens of meters long, from the back of the great prayer hall to the wall above the ceremonial plaza outside Paro Dzong.

The roll of cloth, known as 'Thongdrel', was slowly unrolled. A large crowd flocked to the scene, dressed in the best local costumes. In the soft light of the rising dawn and in front of the astonished eyes of the public gathered in the big courtyard, a spectacular, colorful picture, rich in detail, made entirely of carefully sewn and embroidered patches of cloth, gradually emerged.

It was fascinating to see the cooperation between the monks, who cared to spread the cloth with great care and in full coordination between them. Some watched and made sure that the spreading is level. With loud cries, They instructed their friends who held the ropes on one side of the cloth to hold them in place, while they called on the friends who are responsible for spreading the thongdrel on the other side to release another rope. This coordinated work would also be repeated when the cloth was rolled in a few hours.

In the center of the cloth, the face of Guru Rinpoche, known in Sanskrit as Padmasambhava, gradually emerged. According to tradition, in the eighth century, the great teacher miraculously appeared from a lotus, a flower symbolizing purity and enlightenment. Later, Guru Rinpoche specialized in tantric practices, but the force that motivated him in everything he turned was compassion.

Thus, when Guru Rinpoche was invited by King Trisong Detsen to cleanse Tibet of the demons that ruled it, he exposed them to the Buddhist teachings and transformed all the beings from the horrors of the mountains into enlightened defenders of faith. Guru Rinpoche also exorcised demons in Bhutan. Some of the key sites in the country are sites where he worked. It is not for nothing that he is called the Second Buddha here.

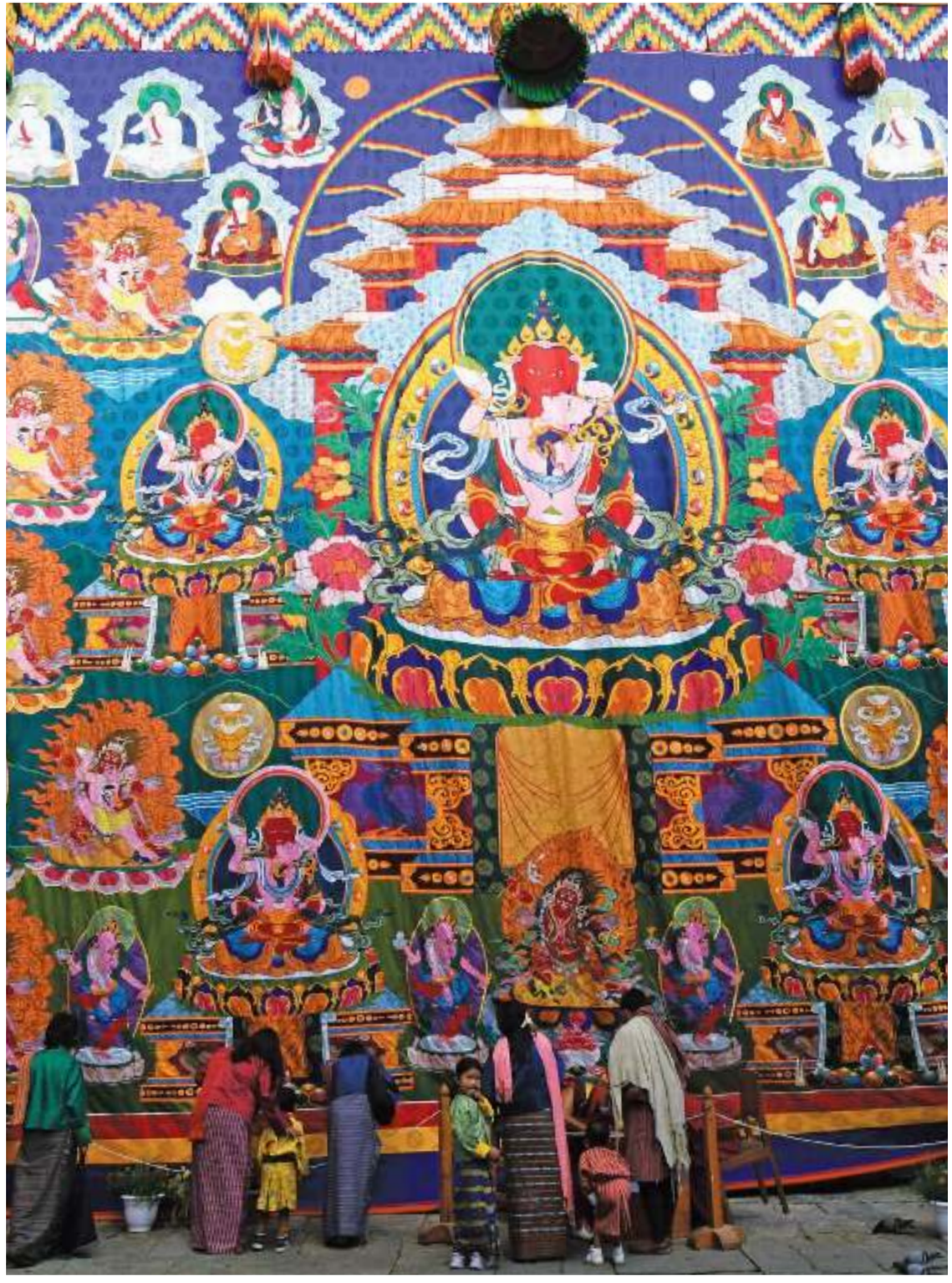
During Tshechu, an annual festival held at the dzong and important monasteries, it is customary to perform a thongdrel opening on one of the festival days. Often the event takes place on the last day of the event, but sometimes on the first.

The thongdrel's opening, once a year for several hours, is one of the highlights of the entire annual festival. It is always a good idea to check in advance what the thongdrel's opening days are, but keep in mind that any program is subject to change, especially if the weather is problematic. The thongdrel is not usually opened on rainy days because it may be damaged.

Everywhere the thongdrel looks different, both in size and color, but what they all have in common is a work of art in fabric, patchwork and embroidery, to which dozens of artisans and craftsmen are entrusted. To make a thongdrel requires great skill, familiarity with the Buddhist artistic canon, and extensive advance planning on a big scale. At the center of each thongdrel is a central figure, who is the subject of the whole cloth. It is surrounded by secondary beings, explanations of her life history, sacred symbols, and decorations; a dizzying texture of colors and shapes.

During my repeating visits to Indo-Tibetan region, I was delighted to see many ceremonies and thongdrel openings. I noticed that in Bhutan most of the thongdrels are dedicated Guru Rinpoche or to Zhabdrung, a spiritual man, warrior, and charismatic leader who unified Bhutan into a single political entity and bequeathed to it the legacy of establishing the





dzong. It seems that those two figures are the most popular to be depicted in cloth.

Seeing the Sublime

The thongdrel is not just a decoration. It is a sacred representation of the higher beings represented in it, and so is the attitude towards it. Thongdrel is actually a pair of words that mean "liberation by looking". Indeed, looking, seeing, are at the basis of Hindu and Buddhist worship, as it developed in India before it reached the Himalayas in Tibet and Bhutan.

When Hindus and Buddhists make their way to a temple, they do not usually say that they are going to worship or pray, but rather that they are going to do 'darshan' (in Sanskrit, to see), meaning to see the god.

For the common man, the essence of the religious ceremony is standing before the image of God and looking at it with the expectation that the gaze will be mutual, meaning that the believer will see the material form of God while God will allow him to behold his sublime essence, which is not embodied in matter. The point of connection between God and the believer is the eyes. Through them, the believer receives the blessing of the sublime.

It seems appropriate to point out that Buddha's veiled gaze does not express boredom or fatigue, or even contempt, as Westerners often believe. Buddha's gaze symbolizes equanimity toward all phenomena in the world, both the "good" and the "bad".

In India, it is said of the gods, the all-seeing ones, that they never close their eyes. The good of the world depends on their open eyes, and disaster can occur when, God forbid, they close their eyes. Sometimes, the world is a weak vessel to contain the piercing gaze of the god. Then the eyes of the god are covered so as not to be scorched by his gaze.

Gods and religious figures are considered to give sermons, that is, to allow those who come to them to see them, while believers receive sermons. This is a profound and fascinating idea, indicating that it is not the believer who initiates and establishes the gaze, but the god or the religious teacher. The believer is able to see the image or likeness of the god or the religious teacher, but not necessarily himself. The ability to truly see the sublime is given only to the believer full of devotion.

In the ancient Indian context, true 'seeing' is seen as a kind of touch. When the gaze 'touches' an object, the pulsating life within it is transmitted. Gaze and touch were seen as related actions as early as the Vedic period. Sanskrit poets and dramatists gave rich expression to the gaze of the eye, even between lovers and spouses. The language of the eyes was many times richer in the past than it is today.

Hinduism and Buddhism are religions in which the sublime manifests itself in the visible world. Thus, the eyes play a central role in the perception of the sacred. Unrolling a thongdrel rug for a few hours once a year, before being unrolled again, gives the visual experience of the sublime a ceremonial, heightened, and almost theatrical touch.

It is not for nothing that crowds flock to gaze directly into the embroidered eyes and dive into whatever is hidden beyond them, or alternatively, lower their gaze and avoid eye contact with the embroidered gaze above them, thereby expressing their inferiority in the face of the power embodied in it.

Touching the Edge of the Mantle

After a thongdrel is spread out on a designated wall or hung on one of the walls of the dzong or monastery, a public prayer is often held before it, attended by the large crowd that gathers there for the occasion. A large congregation of monks sits at the foot of the embroidered work and engages in a lengthy prayer, during which offerings of incense, fruits, and more are offered to the being whose image is emblazoned on the cloth.

Often, folk dances are performed in front of the spread thongdrel by the community's sons and daughters, and sometimes also Chhams, masked dances performed exclusively by monks. The faithful who come to witness the sacred work march in a single line and approach the thongdrel from left to right. They walk along it, clasping their palms together, bowing their heads, and often touching the edges of the cloth.

Many of the faithful offer a *khadhar,* a white scarf that symbolizes spiritual merit, purity and blessing. It is also customary to add a monetary donation. The entire ceremony purifies the souls of the faithful and leaves them with the feeling that they have come a little closer to the object of their souls – the longed-for enlightenment.



YOTAM JACOBSON

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Jinlab Agro Products is a story of passion, hard work, and quality. Its founder, Kalyan Mahat, was inspired by the struggles of farmers in his rural village in Bhutan and set out to create a solution. Jinlab Agro Products was founded in 2020 with the aim of providing a sustainable source of market for Bhutanese farmers by adding value to their crops.

Starting with just one product, Kiwi Jam, Jinlab Agro Products has since developed a range of 38 premium seasonal products such as spices, premium fresh fruit jams, essential oils, and Shilajit (Himalayan rock mineral).

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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.











Choki School

A Window into Bhutan's Living Heritage









As your plane descends into the Paro valley, Bhutan begins to work its quiet magic. Prayer flags ripple in the wind, monasteries cling to cliffs, and a culture rooted in preservation reveals itself. Yet to truly understand Bhutan, you must step beyond the road and into a place where tradition is not displayed, but lived.

Just outside Thimphu lies such a place: the Choki Traditional Art School (CTAS). It was founded in 1999 with a bold vision that Bhutan's greatest treasure—its heritage—could also be its greatest opportunity. What began as a compassionate initiative has grown into one of Bhutan's most meaningful cultural experiences.

A School of Living Tradition

CTAS is housed in a traditional home dating back to the 17th Century. Here, students from remote villages and modest backgrounds receive a free education—not in conventional academics, but in Bhutan's sacred arts. Thangka painting, embroidery, woodcarving, sculpture, and other traditional crafts are taught.

As you walk through the campus, the sound of chisels on wood, looms humming softly, and brushes gliding across canvas fill the air. Each classroom tells a story—not only of skills being taught, but of lives being transformed, vividly seen through its graduates:

Dorji Wangchuk — The Pioneer

The school's first graduate in 2005, Dorji arrived as a village boy with raw talent but few opportunities. Today, he runs a renowned thangka studio in Thimphu, with his works adorning dzongs across Bhutan. In 2025, as Chairman of the CTAS Alumni Association, he led initiatives that provided scholarships for five new students the following year.

"CTAS didn't just give me a skill," he says. "It gave me a voice."

Sangay Tshering — The Weaver of Change

As CTAS's first female embroidery graduate in 2013, Sangay quietly broke barriers. Now an instructor herself, she leads a class of young women, turning vibrant threads into livelihoods and legacies.

"I was given a precious chance to learn," she says. "Now my students carry these patterns into the world"

Kinley Wangchuk — Keeper of Wood and Spirit

Trained in the art of traditional woodcarving, Kinley has become one of Bhutan's most soughtafter artisans. He restores pillars, beams, and altars in temples and monasteries across the country, blending technical mastery with spiritual devotion. Today, he also provides employment to many CTAS graduates, extending the school's impact into communities nationwide.

"When I carve," he reflects, "I feel uplifted and grateful for the opportunities I've been given."

One of the most evocative experiences at CTAS is its 17th century living museum. Designed to reflect traditional Bhutanese architecture and lifestyle, it offers a glimpse into a time when craftsmanship shaped daily life. Unlike conventional museums, this space feels alive—objects are not relics, but reflections of skills still practiced just steps away in the classrooms.

Here, Bhutan's history, spiritual beliefs, and artistic traditions connect in quiet, powerful ways. Visitors often realize they are not simply learning about Bhutan's past, but witnessing how it continues to breathe in the present.

Handson Encounters

For many, the highlight of a visit is joining a painting workshop. Guided by students and instructors, guests try their hand at Bhutanese motifs, discovering the patience and precision such art demands. What you take home is more than a painted souvenir—it is the memory of sitting at a wooden table, brush in hand, surrounded by a culture that generously shares its knowledge.

Before leaving, visitors often explore the Choki Artisans shop, a curated space offering authentic crafts made by students, Alumni and local artisans. Each purchase sustains a cycle of learning, empowerment, and preservation. Every piece carries the spirit of Bhutanese craftsmanship—made slowly, honestly, and with intention.

A Taste of Bhutan

The journey concludes at the Choki Restaurant and Café, where guests enjoy an authentic Bhutanese meal in a warm, relaxed setting. Traditional flavors, simple hospitality, and sweeping views create a moment of pause—a chance to reflect on the experience.

More Than a Visit

A visit to CTAS is not something to check off an itinerary. It is an encounter with Bhutan's heart and soul. It is where heritage becomes personal, where creativity becomes hope, and where visitors leave not only informed, but quietly moved. If your travels bring you to Thimphu, let this be a place you make time for. You may arrive as a visitor, but you will leave feeling part of a story still being written.



SONAM CHOKI

Daughter of the school founder, she is the principal of Choki Traditional Art School. She helped her father pursue his dream to establish the school since 1999 when the school was started, commemorating the His Majesty the Fourth King's 25 years of glorious reign.

Visitor Information

Where: Kabesa, North Thimphu (10 km from city center)
Why Go: An authentic, immersive cultural experience that directly supports youth education
What to Do: Observe classes, join a miniworkshop, visit the gallery, meet the students
Pro Tip: Plan for at least 1.5 hours to ensure you have time to enjoy and immerse yourself in most of the experiences.

Opening Hours: Monday to Saturday | 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM (Closed Sundays)
Contact: 17627369/17607032/17603135
Chokiartisans@gmail.com | www.chokiartisans.com

Walk with us through Bhutan's living tradition.













FROM FARMERS TO CAFÉS

THE BHUTAN MOUNTAIN COFFEE STORY

Supporting rural livelihoods through eco-friendly coffee cultivation across Bhutan's southern belt

Bhutan Mountain Coffee, a premium coffee enterprise founded by entrepreneur Karma Chime, is demonstrating how a sustainable partnership between farmers and business can nurture both the land and local communities, proving that Bhutan's development philosophy can thrive in a single cup of coffee.

The story of Bhutan Mountain Coffee is rooted in a simple yet ambitious idea: to grow and produce high-quality Bhutanese coffee while creating sustainable income opportunities for farmers. Inspired by café culture he encountered abroad, Karma Chime returned home with a vision to cultivate a uniquely Bhutanese coffee industry. Recognizing the country's potential for growing Arabica coffee in its southern belt, he launched Bhutan Mountain Coffee in 2016 with a model that prioritized collaboration with farmers, environmental conservation, and quality production.

From Experimentation to Expansion

The journey began with the first coffee experimentation in Samtse, where favorable climatic conditions and altitude offered ideal growing environments.

What started as a small initiative gradually evolved into a structured program involving local farmers. By providing technical training, saplings, and assured market access, Bhutan Mountain Coffee encouraged farming communities to diversify their crops and adopt coffee cultivation as a reliable source of income.

Over time, the initiative has expanded beyond Samtse to several regions across Bhutan. In Nganglam in Pemagatshel, where farmers had already been growing coffee on a small scale, Bhutan Mountain Coffee has stepped in to guarantee market access. This year alone, the company purchased around 15 tons of coffee cherry from farmers in the area, providing tangible economic incentives and motivating further cultivation. Plans are now underway to expand plantations in Choekhorling Gewog in Pemagatshel and in Kengkhar, Mongar. It also purchased coffee cherry from farming communities in Gelephu.

Coffee has been introduced in around seven gewogs in Zhemgang under the Million Fruit Tree Initiative. Bhutan Mountain Coffee has assured a ready market for the harvests. In Tingtibi, Bhutan Mountain Coffee has been given land to establish a processing plant. This will provide a ready market for coffee grown by farmers.

Beyond infrastructure, the company provides farmers with continuous technical guidance, including training in sustainable cultivation practices, pest management, and soil conservation. Saplings are distributed to encourage new plantations, while research efforts focus on identifying coffee varieties suited to Bhutan's diverse ecological conditions.

Sustainable Livelihoods for Rural Communities

For many farming families, coffee cultivation has emerged as a stable source of income that complements traditional crops. By guaranteeing market access, Bhutan Mountain Coffee reduces the risks often associated with commercial farming. This assurance encourages farmers to invest in long-term cultivation, fostering economic resilience in rural communities. The cooperative model has already engaged hundreds of farming households, creating new opportunities in regions where employment options are limited. Seasonal harvesting, processing, and transport activities generate additional income streams, strengthening community-based development.

From Farm to Cup

Bhutan Mountain Coffee's product range reflects its commitment to quality and innovation. The company produces a variety of roasts and blends, from robust house coffees to smooth specialty profiles. Its products include roasted beans, ground coffee, drip packs for travelers, and beverages served through its expanding network of Mountain Café outlets.

At its cafés, including flagship locations in Paro, Thimphu, and Phuentsholing, the company offers an experience that connects consumers directly to Bhutanese agriculture. Coffee served in these spaces carries the story of the farmers who cultivated the beans and the landscapes that shaped their flavor. Bhutan Mountain Café will also be establishing its franchise in Gelephu Mindfulness City.

Bhutan Mountain Coffee's approach reflects a broader vision of development, one that balances economic growth with environmental responsibility and social well-being. By integrating sustainable farming, rural empowerment, and premium production, the company has created a model that benefits farmers, consumers, and the environment alike.

Lungta Art Festival 2026

AWAKENING THE POWER TO RADIATE GOODNESS WITHIN AND BEYOND



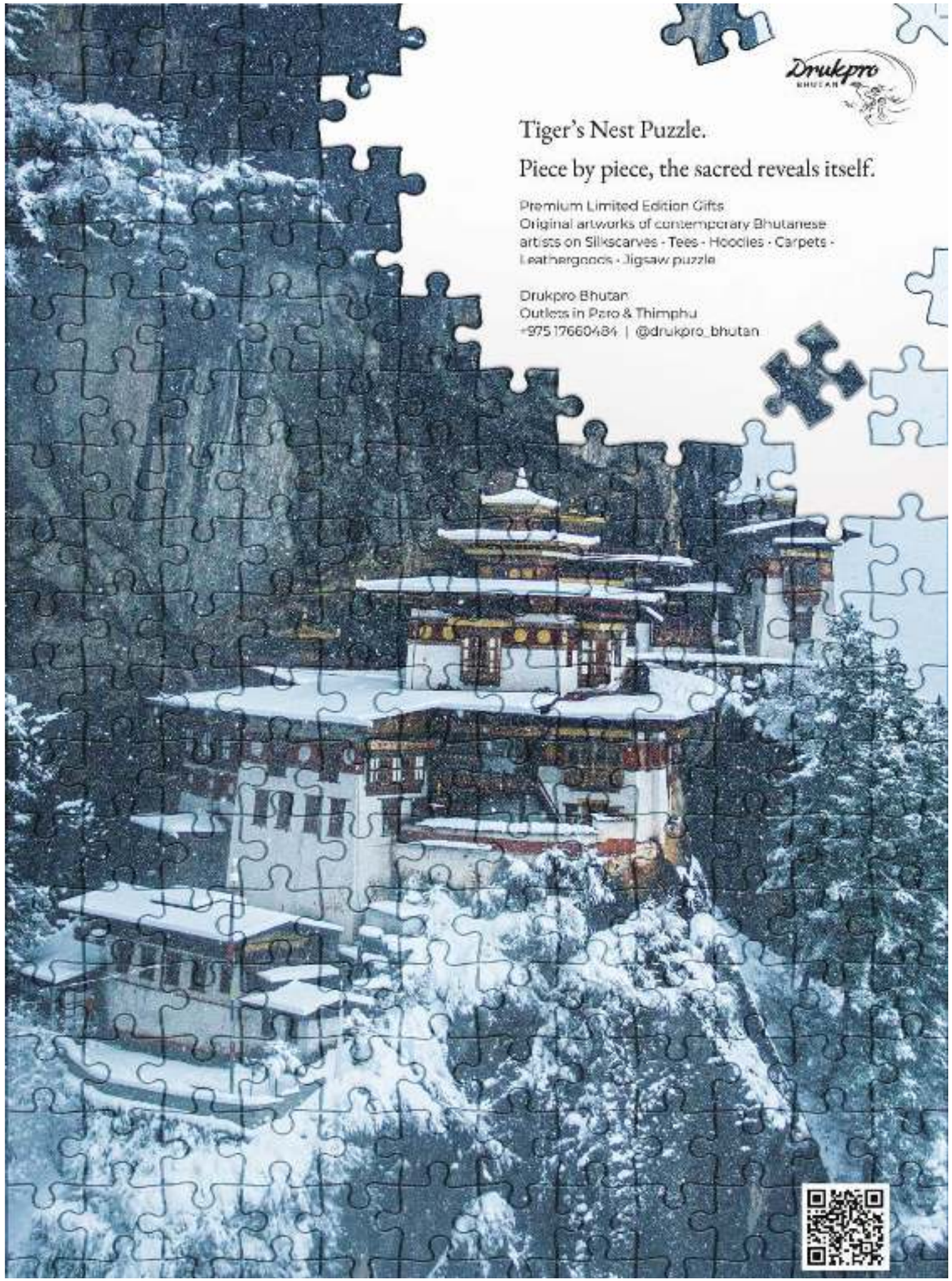
With the blessings of Their Majesties The King and Queen of Bhutan, VAST Bhutan presents the Lungta Art Festival 2026, a year-long national art festival inspired by the symbolism of Lungta (Wind Horse) and rooted in Bhutanese spiritual values, ecological mindfulness, and contemporary creative expression. More than a celebration of art, the festival unfolds as a reflective journey where art, spirituality, and community converge inviting audiences to pause, reconnect, and rediscover the quiet forces that shape wellbeing: compassion, balance, and basic human goodness.

Through group and solo exhibitions, participatory workshops, and mindful community engagements, the festival explores how traditional wisdom can meaningfully respond to contemporary challenges. As the Lungta is unveiled, untangled, and gradually unleashed, the festival conveys a simple yet profound understanding: when harmony within oneself and with nature is consciously nurtured, Lungta rises naturally, thereby awakening the power to radiate goodness within, through communities, and into the wider world.

March–April 2026 | Festival Highlights

February 21, 2026 - UNVEIL | Festival Launch (Inaugural group exhibition)
March 20-25, 2026 - Innovative Xylographic Woodblock Workshop on Lungta Flags
April 7, 2026 - Solo Exhibition by the Festival Director, Asha Kama Wangdi

To explore the full festival journey and upcoming activities, visit
www.lungta.vastbhutan.org.bt or contact: Ms. Sonam Deki, Mobile No. +975 77752813



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IN THE PRESS

Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines Signs Maintenance Agreement with Indamer Aviation

Drukair has formalized a Maintenance Agreement with Indamer Aviation Private Limited in a signing ceremony held in the presence of Dasho Dhondup Gyaltshen.

The agreement was signed by Mr. Tandi Wangchuk, Chief Executive Officer of Drukair, and Mr. Rajeev Gupta, Chief Executive Officer of Indamer Aviation Private Limited. The partnership marks a significant milestone in strengthening technical cooperation and maintenance support between the two organizations.

This collaboration is expected to enhance operational efficiency and reinforce Drukair's continued commitment to maintaining the highest standards of safety, reliability, and service excellence.



Tongsa Penlop Inspire Program 2025 Concludes with Life-Changing International Experience



The Tongsa Penlop Inspire Program (TPIP), Drukair's flagship educational outreach initiative envisioned by Yab Dasho Dhondup Gyaltshen, successfully concluded its third edition in December 2025, brought together 47 academically promising students and 7 teachers, including three specially abled students, from remote schools and humble backgrounds across Bhutan, offering them a transformative international exposure in Thailand. The adventure began in Bhutan with a vibrant city tour of Thimphu, cultural explorations, grooming sessions with the Drukair crew, and the excitement of their first domestic flight. In Thailand, participants visited Dhammajarinee Witthaya School, engaging with local students in a meaningful cultural and educational exchange. They also explored Dream World, Khao Kheow Zoo, Ocean World, the beach, and shopping hotspots - blending education, cultural immersion, and pure fun into a life-changing global adventure.

Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines and Department of Tourism Sign Joint Marketing Agreement to Promote Bhutan Globally



Drukair and the Department of Tourism, Bhutan have entered into a Joint Marketing Agreement (JMA) aimed at strengthening the promotion of Bhutan as a premier travel destination. This partnership builds upon the multiple collaborative initiatives that Drukair and the DOT have been undertaking together over the years to enhance Bhutan's global tourism presence.

The agreement focuses on showcasing Bhutan's diverse tourism offerings through coordinated advertising and marketing initiatives. Under the JMA, both parties will strategically utilize digital platforms and engage in content collaborations, alongside joint promotional activities at various roadshows and travel fairs.

This initiative is designed to enhance destination visibility, maximize marketing impact, and reinforce Bhutan's presence in key source markets. The JMA reflects the shared commitment of Drukair as the national flag carrier and the Department of Tourism to work collaboratively in positioning Bhutan more effectively on the global tourism landscape while supporting sustainable destination growth.



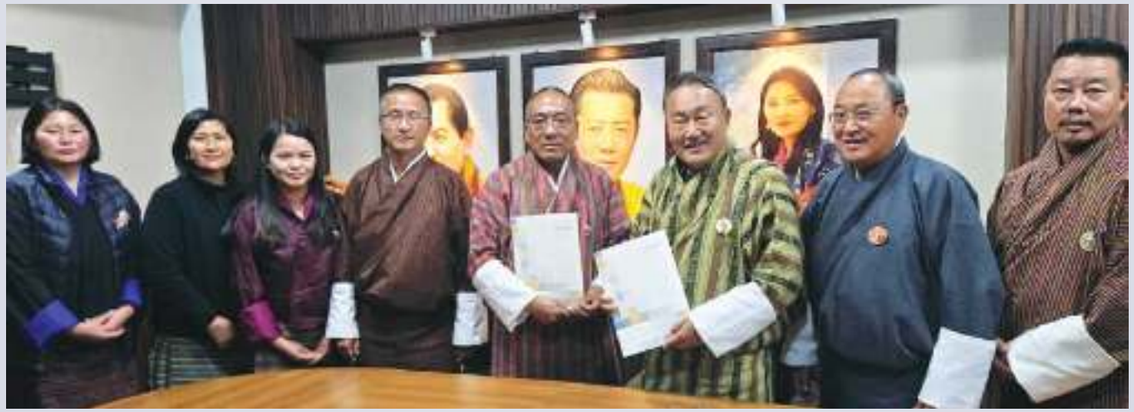
A joyful celebration on board as we marked the 10th Birth Anniversary of His Royal Highness The Gyalsey



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Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines and Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital Renew MoU to Support Medical Referrals Abroad



Drukair and Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital have renewed their partnership through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at continuing special support for patients referred overseas for medical treatment.

The renewed partnership underscores a shared commitment to national service and reflects our dedication to supporting citizens in times of medical need.

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Road,Churchgate,Mumbai - 400020
Phone: +91 22 5621 3825
Email: mumbai@drukair.com.bt /
mumbaicargo@drukair.com.bt

COCHIN

Global Aviation Services Pvt. Ltd.
2A, 2nd Floor, K.G.Oxford Business Centre,Sreekan-
dath Road, Ravipuram, Kochi 682016
Phone: 0484- 2368233
Email: cochin@drukair.com.bt /
cochincargo@drukair.com.bt

HYDERABAD

Global Aviation Services Pvt. Ltd
5-9-58/A/203, 2nd Floor, Gupta Estate, Basheer
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Email: hydrabad@drukair.com.bt /
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CHENNAI

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Road , T.Nagar , Chennai - 600017
Phone: +91 9840168072
Email: chennai@drukair.com.bt /
chennaicargo@drukair.com.bt

PUNE

Global Aviation Services Pvt. Ltd.
3, Hermes Kunj, 48, Mangaldas Road,Pune - 411001
Phone: 020- 41052200
Email: pune@drukair.com.bt

KUWAIT

KUWAIT CITY (GSA - Passenger)

Caesars Int'l Travel Co. W.L.L.
18th Floor, Ajeeburu Tower,
Al Al-Salem Street, Safat-13056,
PB-28220
Tel: +965 22072000
Email: kuwait@drukair.com.bt

KUWAIT CITY (PSA)

Alrashed International Travel Co. W.L.L
Office No: 8/9, Al Salam Tower, Mezzanine Floor,
Fahad Al Salem St., Salhiya; P.O. Box: 242;
Tel: +965 22072707
Email: drukair@alrashed.travel
Website: www.alrashed.travel

UNITED KINGDOM

LONDON (GSA - Passenger)

Flight Directors Scheduled Services Limited
Suite 9a, Gatwick House, Peeks Brook Lane,
Horley, Surrey, RH6 9ST, United Kingdom.
Tel: +44 1293 820412
Email: london@drukair.com.bt

SOUTH KOREA

SEOUL (GSA - Passenger)

Pacific Air International
9F., E-PLAZA Bldg., 25 Sejong-daero 4-gil,
Jung-gu, Seoul, 04527, Republic of Korea.
Tel: +82 2 317 8880
Email: seoul@drukair.com.bt

SEOUL (CSA)

Pacific Air International
9F., E-PLAZA Bldg., 25 Sejong-daero 4-gil, Jung-gu,
Seoul, 04527, Republic of Korea.
Tel: +82 2 317 8822
Email: downtown@pasgrp.co.kr

GERMANY

FRANKFURT (GSA - Passenger)

TAL Aviation Germany UG
Hanauer Landstr. 130, 60314, Frankfurt.
Tel: +49-69-31090200
Email: frankfurt@drukair.com.bt
Website: www.talaviation.com

MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR (GSA - Passenger)

Asia Travel Cafe Sdn Bhd
No.9, Tingkat 1, Jalan Tengkat Tong Shin, Bukit Bin-
tang, 50200 Kuala Lumpur.
Tel: +60 122096287
Email: kualalumpur@drukair.com.bt

SRI LANKA

COLOMBO (GSA - Passenger)

Acorn Aviation Pvt. Ltd.
Hemas Building, 3301 Sir Razik Fareed Mawatha,
Colombo-1, Sri Lanka.
Tel: +94 11 4731554
Email: colombo@drukair.com.bt

VIETNAM

Ho Chi Minh City (GSA- Passenger)

Hong Ngoc Ha Joint Stock Company
15-17 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, Ward 06, District 3
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
Tel: 028 38 365 318
Email: vietnam@drukair.com.bt

FRANCE

PARIS (GSA - Passenger)

TAL Aviation France
59 Boulevard Haussmann, 75008, Paris, France
Tel: +33 1 76 36 12 56
Email: drukair.france@talaviation.fr
Website: www.talaviation.com

enquiry@drukair.com.bt >> for general enquiry (During weekdays - Working Hrs. 9AM-5PM BST)
reservation@drukair.com.bt >> for ticket booking and date change before 4 days of departure. (Within Bhutan only)
wearelistening@drukair.com.bt >> for any complaints and feedback (During weekdays - Working Hrs. 9AM-5PM BST)
happiness@drukair.com.bt >> for queries related to HappinessMiles Program
card_refund@drukair.com.bt >> for any assistance related to ticket purchased from website (During weekdays - Working Hrs. 9AM-5PM BST)

INFO & TIPS

DRUKAIR FLIGHT TIMING

As Bhutan's National Flag carrier operating in and out of Paro, Drukair requests every passenger to refer Conditions of Carriage and the foot note on ticket itinerary. Due to operational challenges out of Paro International Airport in Bhutan that is severely dependdent on weather conditions, Drukair makes every effort to maintain the schedule integrity. However due to circumstances beyond our control, schedule timings are subject to change without prior notice. Therefore, we request travelers to check with Drukair offices or its agents for the latest information.

RESERVATION

For any travel requirements, please contact reservation@drukair.com.bt or call our toll free number 1300 (in-country) / +975 8276430 (international) / WhatsApp number +975 17131300 for any assistance required.
International airlies, tour promoters and travel agents abroad are invited to communicate their reservation requirements with the space control of Drukair.

RECONFIRMATION

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).

VALIDITY

Tickets issued against full fare are valid for a period of one year from the date of travel, except as otherwise specified in the ticket conditions.

CHANGE IN FARE AND TAXES

Fares and taxes are subject to change without notice. In the event of a passenger commencing journey after a revised tariff becomes effective, the differences between the fare paid and the fare applicable will be collected from the passenger before embarkation.

REFUND AND CANCELLATION

Refund of ticket can be made at the issuing office. For the conditions of refund and cancellation, please check with any Drukair Office.

BAGGAGE

A checked baggage allowance of 40kg in business class and 30kg in economy on international flights and 20kg for economy and 30kg for business class for domestic flights is permissible. An infant under two years of age is not entitled to baggage allowance.

HAND BAGGAGE

For security reasons and your own safety, passengers are allowed to carry only one piece of hand baggage. The total of its three dimensions must not exceed 100 cm, and the weight must not exceed 5 kg in Economy Class and 7 kg in Business Class.

SECURITY

All passengers and their baggage are subject to check before boarding a flight. Transit passengers are thefefore requested to remain on board at transit stations as otherwise, they will be again subject to security checks.

According to the Security Regulations, passengers are advised:

Not to accept any baggage/packet from unknown person. Not to leave baggage unobserved at anytime especially within airport area. Unattended baggage may be removed by the Airport Security Staff as object of suspicion.

If passengers are carrying any arms or explosive substance, it must be declared before check-in.
Concealment is an offense under Aircrafts Act & Rules.

To remove battery/dry cells from radio, transistor sets, two-in-one and other such electrical/electronic items and hand them over to the airline staff before security check or carry them in registered baggage.

CUSTOMS: TOURIST ALLOWANCE

A tourist is allowed to bring any quantity of tobacco products. However, it must be declared at the customs. The import of tobacco products is subjected to 100% Customs Duty.

A tourist shall be allowed to import temporarily free customs duty for his/her personal effects and articles required for the visit, provided that the items imported are for personal use only. A tourist is allowed to bring in one liter of alcohol.

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 "dorna" (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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"COMING SOON"

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 (For tourists)

FROM	TO	DISTANCE (KM)	DRIVING TIME (APPROX)
Thimphu	Paro	49.9	1 hr
Thimphu	Phuentsholing	146.2	4 hrs
Phuentsholing	Bagdora	154.7	4 hrs
Thimphu	Wangduephodrang	70	3 hrs
Thimphu	Punakha	77	3 hrs
Punakha	Wangduephodrang	13	45 min
Wangduephodrang	Trongsa	129	4 hrs 30 min
Trongsa	Bumthang	68	2 hrs
Bumthang	Mongar	193	7 hrs
Mongar	Lhuentse	75	3 hrs
Mongar	Trashigang	91	3 hrs 30 min
Trashigang	Chorten Kora	51	2 hrs
Trashigang	Samdrup Jongkhar	180	7 hrs
Samdrup Jongkhar	Guwahati	110	3 hrs
Samdrup Jongkhar	Phuentsholing	400	10 hrs
Thimphu	Gelephu	243	6 hrs 30 min
Phuentsholing	Gelephu	196.6	4 hrs 45 min

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,Chumi, Bumthang	3rd March
Tangsibi Mani	Tangsibi Lhakhang, Ura Bumthang	4th – 6th March
Chhorten Kora	Chorten Kora, Trashiyangtshe	3rd March & 19th March
Gomphukora	Gom Kora Lhakhang, Trashiyangtshe	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 (Thongdral on last day)
Rhododendron Festival	Lamperi Botanical Park,Thimphu	13th – 14th April
Domkhar Tshechu	Domkhar,Chumi,Bumthang.	26th – 28th April
Ura Yakchoe	Ura Lhakhang,Bumthang	28th April – 2nd May
Nimalung Tshechu	Nimalung Dratshang,Chumi, 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	Tashi Chhodzong, 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	Tashi Chhodzong, 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, Chumni, 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
Phuntsholing Tshechu	Phuntsholing, 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)
Samdrupjongkhar Tshechu	Samdrupjongkhar	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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DRUK HERBAL CORDYCEPS

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