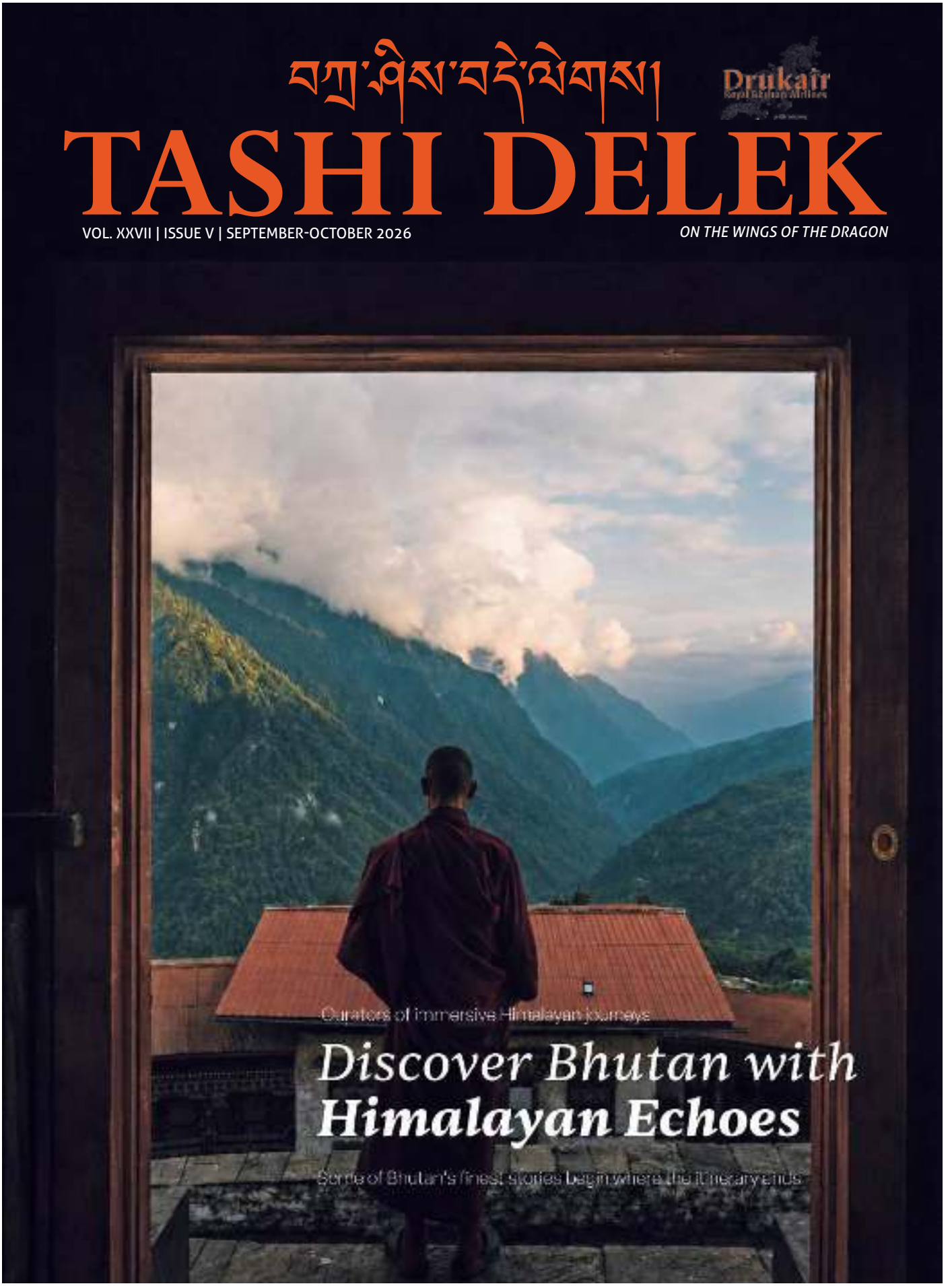
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VOL. XXVII | ISSUE V | SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2026

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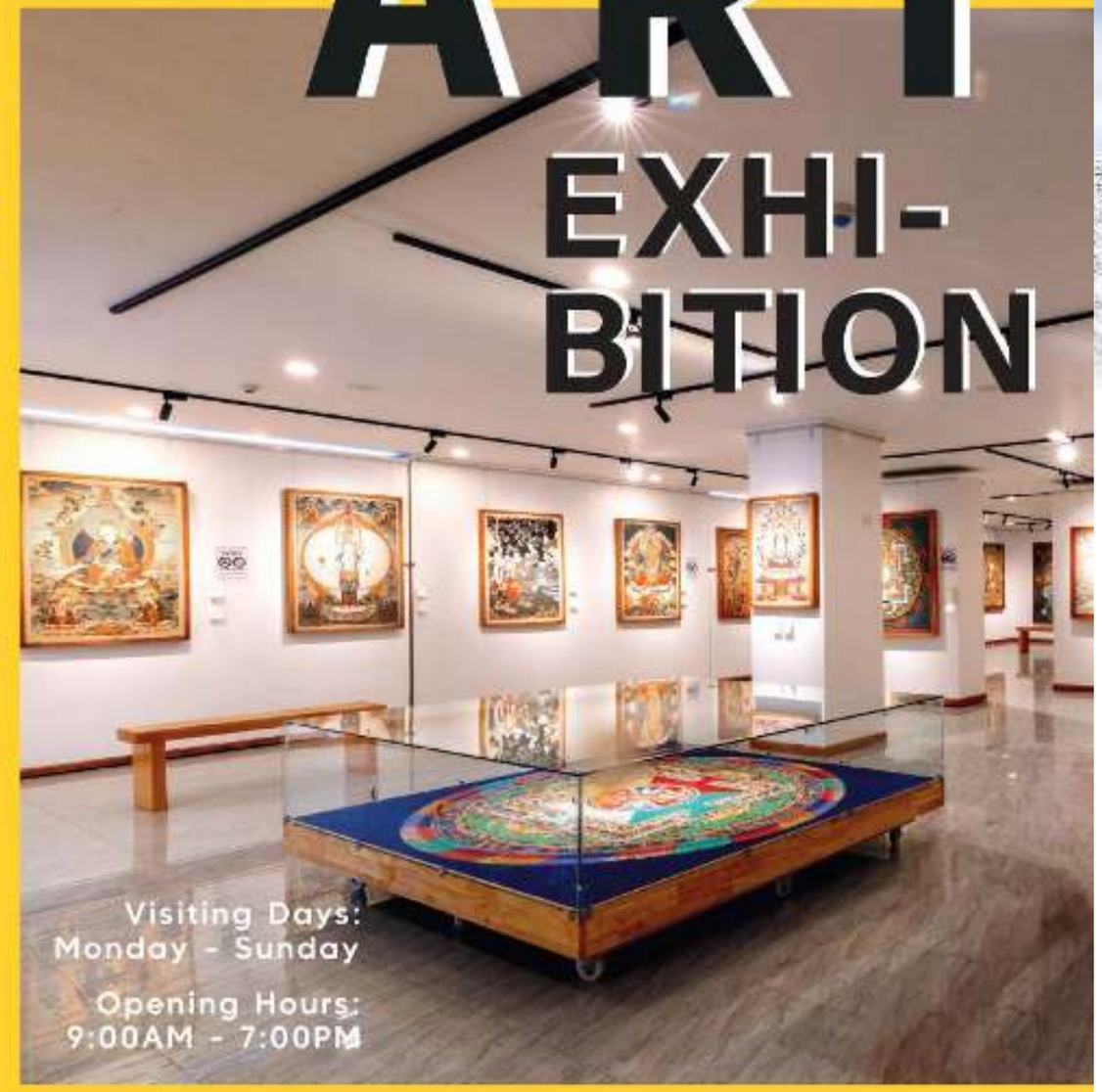
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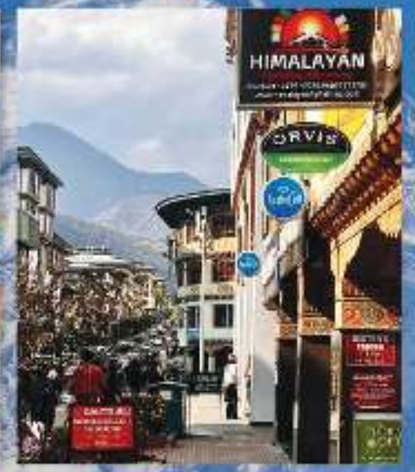
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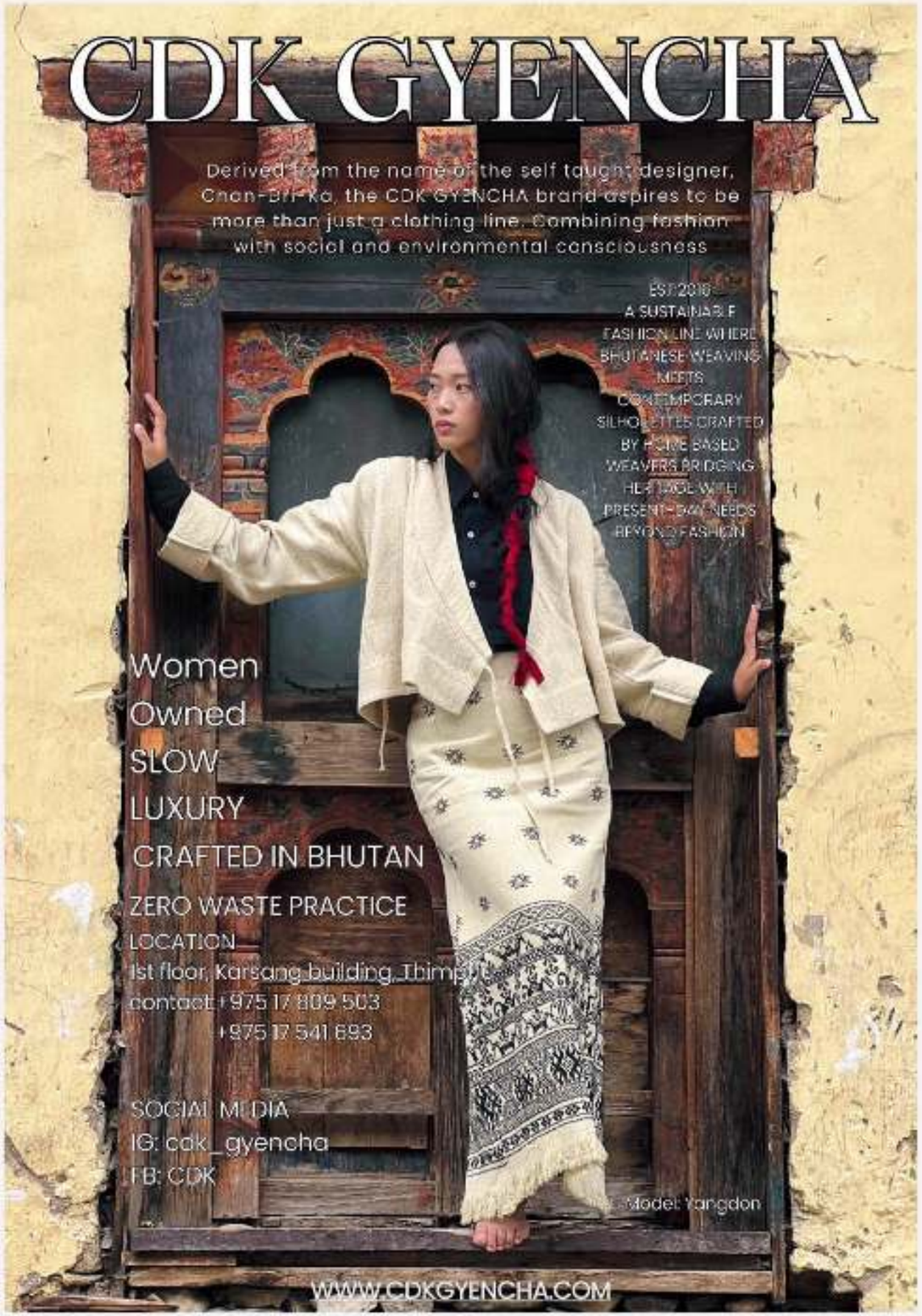
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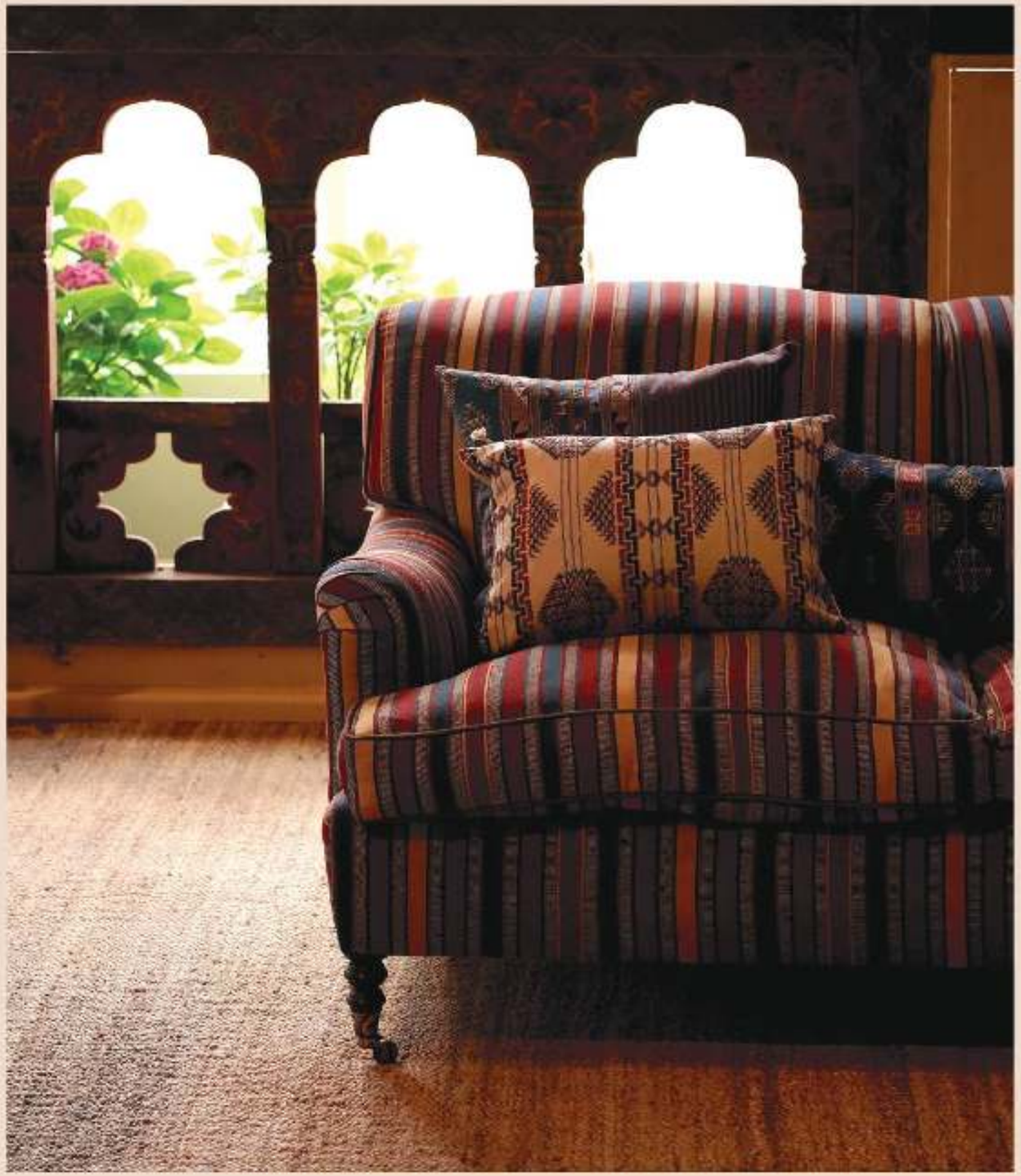
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Made in Bhutan mark represents vitality, purity, and dignity – qualities highly suitable to represent Bhutanese-made products. It encourages consumers to choose products that are authentically Bhutanese, not only because they are genuine and handcrafted, but also because they are sustainably and happily made in Bhutan's pristine environment, reflecting the country's commitment to quality, craftsmanship, and well-being.

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Grown in Bhutan mark represents the pristine nature and organic Bhutanese produce. It encourages consumers to choose Bhutanese products that are naturally grown using nature-based practices and sustainable farming methods by farmers and producers who are committed to producing wholesome, high-quality food.













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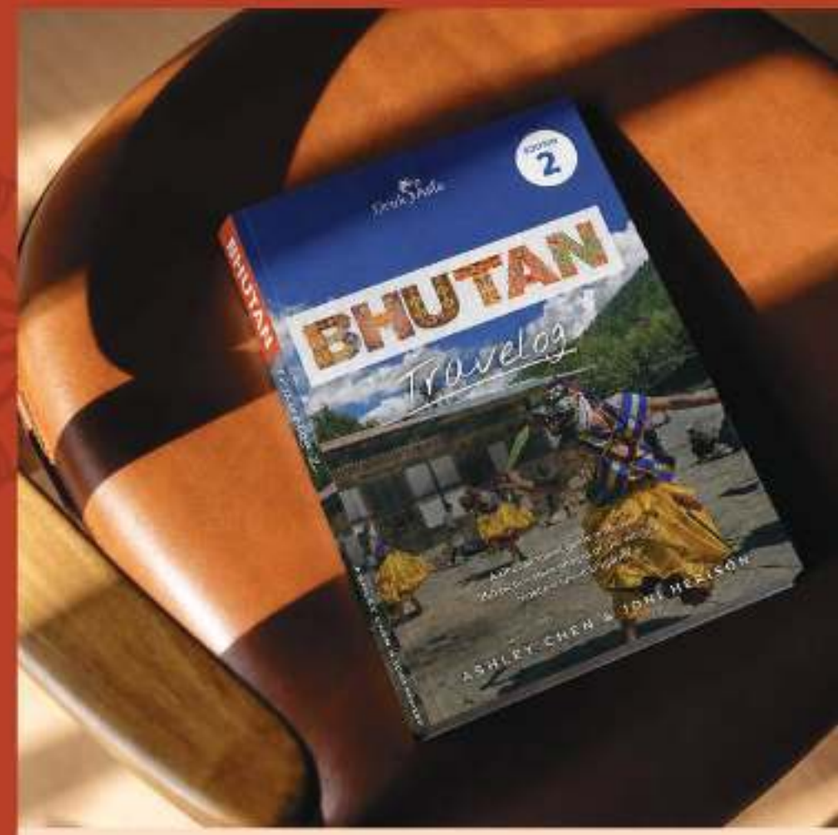
The **Bhutan SEAL Award**, established in 2009 and inspired by the UNESCO Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts, is one of the highest recognitions for Bhutanese handicraft products. It celebrates exceptional quality, craftsmanship, innovation, authenticity, and market appeal.

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Dear Passengers,



Tandi Wangchuk
Chief Executive Officer
Drukair Corporation Ltd.

As the seasons change and autumn unfolds across Bhutan, we are reminded that every journey has the power to connect people, inspire new perspectives, and strengthen relationships. At Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, these connections remain at the heart of everything we do. Whether welcoming visitors discovering Bhutan for the first time or serving our fellow Bhutanese travelling for work, study, family, or leisure, we are privileged to be part of your journey.

The September-October period is among the most vibrant times of the year in Bhutan. Our valleys come alive with colorful festivals, communities gather to celebrate traditions passed down through generations, and visitors from around the world are welcomed to experience the warmth and authenticity of Bhutanese culture. As the national flag carrier of the Kingdom of Bhutan, we take immense pride in making these experiences more accessible while ensuring every journey reflects the values of care, respect, and hospitality that define our country.

As aviation continues to evolve, we remain committed to embracing technology and digitalization to enhance our operations and passenger experience. While we continue to modernize and improve our services, our commitment to personal service and Bhutanese hospitality remains at the heart of all that we do.

Equally important is our commitment to sustainable and responsible growth. We recognize that our role extends beyond transportation. We have a responsibility to support the nation's economic development, strengthen tourism, facilitate trade, and connect families and communities, all while respecting the environmental values that make Bhutan unique. These responsibilities inspire us to operate with purpose and to contribute positively to the country's long-term aspirations.

None of our achievements would be possible without the dedication of our employees, the continued collaboration of our partners, and the unwavering support of our passengers. Your confidence in Drukair motivates us to strive for higher standards and to continually improve the way we serve you.

As we move through this beautiful season, I invite you to embrace new experiences, reconnect with loved ones, and discover the many journeys that await. We look forward to welcoming you on board and being part of your travels.

On behalf of everyone at Drukair, I sincerely thank you for choosing to fly with us.

Wishing you safe travels and a memorable journey ahead.

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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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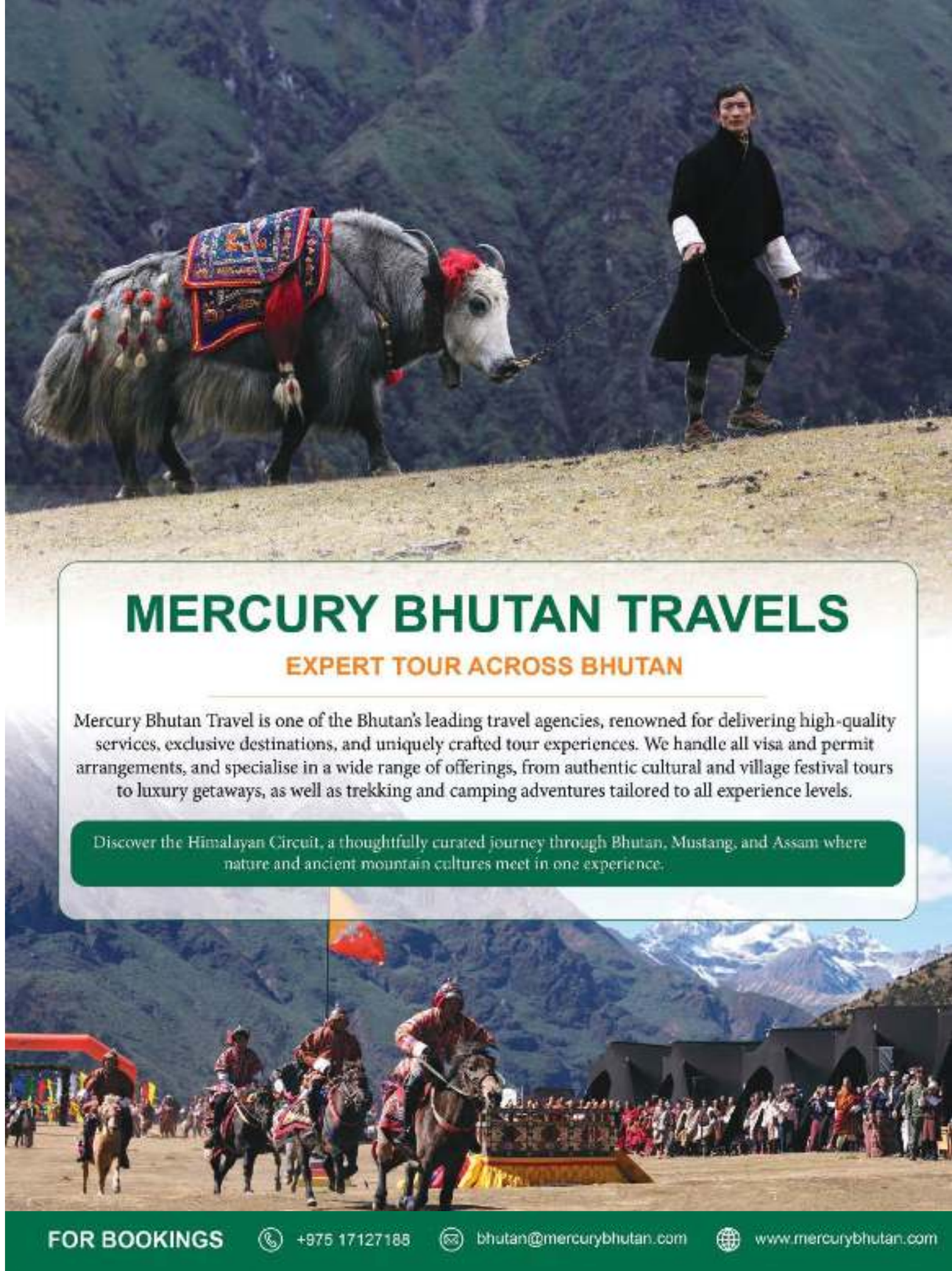
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TASHI DELEK

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



CARBON STATUS

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



DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

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

Buddhist Mountain Temples of Bhutan

Religious and spiritual structures exist all over the world. Some of the most “zen” and sublime among them are Buddhist temples. They can be found all across Asia, and as far as Africa, the Americas, Europe, and the Pacific, but are most numerous and significant in their originating locales in the Himalayas. It can be argued that nowhere on the planet are there more culturally preserved and intact Buddhist temples than in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

Hundreds of Buddhist temples adorn the mountains and valleys of Bhutan. It is one of its most striking, inviting and mystical features. Unlike historical relics or “archeological” religious structures used by extinct civilizations in other parts of the world, Buddhist temples in Bhutan are living, breathing places for religious, spiritual and cultural practices. They are frequented by Bhutanese women, men and youth on a regular basis, and are also home to thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns who live within the intricate temple complex.

The Buddhist temples of Bhutan draw thousands of foreign pilgrims, tourists and travelers from around the world. Some temples are significant sacred sites according to Buddhist history, while others are culturally, architecturally or locally significant. It is close to impossible to travel in Bhutan without encountering or visiting one of its enchanting Buddhist mountain temples.

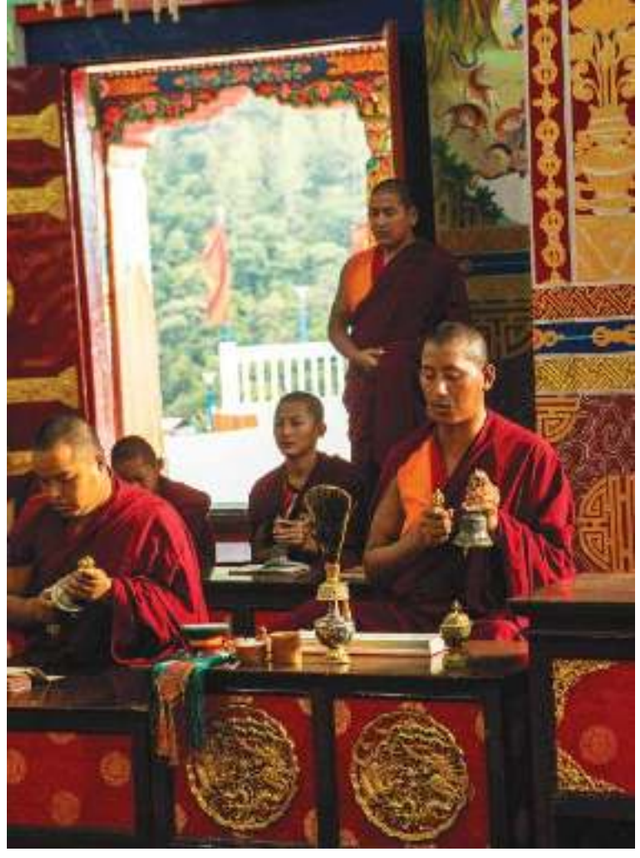
Exploring Bhutan’s temples is a journey through time, from structures built many centuries ago to newer ones. It is a journey to the heart and soul of a country with unique history, spiritual significance, and rich cultural heritage. The Buddhist temple is a material cultural representation of this. The spiritual practices, ceremonies and the chanting of mantras accompanied by Buddhist musical drums, cymbals and horns performed within its auspicious walls, represent intangible cultural forms that date back centuries.

Historical, Spiritual and Socio-cultural Significance

Vajrayana Buddhism is the religion practiced by the majority of Bhutanese women, men and youth across the country. By extension and in simple terms, a Buddhist temple is a place of worship, ceremonies and spiritual activities for Buddhists and followers of Buddhism. A lhakhang (Buddhist temple), literally means “the house of the enlightened one” or “divine dwelling”, referring The Buddha, who gained enlightenment. The Buddhist temple is an important spiritual place that honors other deities and revered lamas. It is a sacred structure built according to complex Buddhist principles, cosmological understandings, iconography and symbolism that often houses sacred Buddhist objects.

One gets a sense of awe when visiting lhakhangs, a sense that is heightened by the location where it usually built. Often located on the peaks of mountains, on mountain ledges and plateaus, Buddhist temples are not always easy to get to. This is because it is believed that the harder it is to walk, hike or trek to a Buddhist scared site, such as a lhakhang, the greater the merit or good karma a person generates. This means that practicing Buddhists who take the long uphill journey by foot to lhakhangs are not only benefit from the physical fitness, but from earning spiritually blessings.

The architecture of Buddhist temples in Bhutan is unique as compared to Buddhist temples in India, Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Korea and Japan, for instance, where Mahayana and Theravada forms of Buddhism are prevalent. The distinctly Vajrayana Buddhist architectural style in Bhutan is similar to that of temples in



Tibet and Northern Nepal. However, there are slight architectural variations within Bhutan, according to sub-regional influences and the historical period it was built. It is believed that the oldest surviving lhakhang dates back to the seventh century, when Buddhism began to spread in the country.

The architecture of the lhakhang follows a set of principles rooted in Vajrayana Buddhist cosmology and conventions that have been transmitted through centuries of monastic scholarship and building practice. These Buddhist principles shape its orientation, proportions and spatiality that influence the interior layout of its ceilings, beams, columns, murals and altar arrangements.

Lhakhangs are often built in a rectangular or square shape, with thick rammed-earth or stone walls, intricately carved and/or colorfully painted timber columns and beams, and flat, pitched or multi-tiered pagoda style roofs. The exterior walls are whitewashed with a band of red paint at the top of the wall to indicate the building is a religious structure. Its interior walls are adorned with hand-painted murals depicting key Buddhist figures, history, symbolic images and protective motifs.

The central focal point in the interior of the lhakhang is its altar, positioned against the wall opposite the entrance. The altar is adorned with a principal statue, often of The Buddha, or other religious figures or deities, and flanked on either side following a hierarchical arrangement of statues of The Buddha in different postures, or bodhisattvas, deities or lineage masters. In front of the altar is adorned by seven brass or glass bowls containing water offerings, rows of brass or silver butter lamps that symbolize the light of wisdom and the dispelling of the darkness of ignorance, and many other religious objects. Normally situated beside the altar and stacked on shelves are volumes of Buddhist scripture wrapped in intricate brocade cloth. Sometimes placed in front of the altar, are large brocade covered chairs reserved for visiting high-ranking religious lamas and important figures.

Many Bhutanese houses also dedicate space or entire rooms for a personal shrine. However, these can be differentiated from lhakhangs, which are larger stand-alone structures built, maintained and serviced by monks and nuns, under the official direction of the Central Monastic Body. There also exist privately owned lhakhangs whereby individuals or households dedicate an entire building for the sole purpose of serving as Buddhist temple, often to house or enshrine historical sacred family, village or community objects, and where monks and nuns are regularly invited to perform spiritual ceremonies, rituals and blessings.

Significant Buddhist Temples

Within the wider practice of Buddhism, beyond Bhutan, it is believed that there exist a handful of seminal, sacred Buddhist sites in the world. These include, for example, the sacred birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, The Buddha, in Lumbini Nepal, the sacred mountain of Mount Kailash in Tibet, and Paro Taktsang in Bhutan. There are also numerous sacred Buddhist sites that are important to the practice of Buddhism in Bhutan. Here, I outline a very small handful of significant Buddhist temples. There are many more amazing lhakhangs that can be explored beyond the few described below.

Paro Taktsang, Tiger's Nest – built originally in 1622 in Paro, and perched high on a 3,120-meter tall cliff in a way that seems to defy gravity itself, is one of the most iconic Buddhist temples of Bhutan, Tiger's Nest, or Paro Taktsang. It is perhaps the most photographed temple, and seems to encapsulate the essence of Bhutan. It is perhaps the most revered and world-famous pilgrimage destination for Buddhists within Bhutan, as well as those visiting the country. The journey to this sacred temple involves a robust 2-3 hour hike, or less depending on your speed and athletic level. The hike takes you past streams, forests, prayer wheels and a trail adorned with many fluttering prayer flags. The last stretch of the hike winds up a long set of stairs that hug the mountainside, with prayer flags stretched across the valley below, before bringing pilgrims to the temple. The breathtaking views along the hike and at the temple are well worth the effort. The legendary temple is the place where Guru Rinpoche, the revered Buddhist lama who spread Buddhism in Bhutan, took refuge in a cave of a tiger's lair tucked under the present temple complex. According to legend, he came to this site on the back of a tigress to meditate in the cave for over three years. It is said that he subdued a demon to bring long-lasting peace in the valley. The temple was later built around the cave, and comprises many shrine rooms. Every year, hundreds of pilgrims wait for hours to visit the temple on an auspicious day when the cave is opened in order to bestow blessings.

Kyichu lhakhang – built in the seventh century in Paro, is one of Bhutan's oldest temples. Originally built as a small temple it houses several intricate frescoes and designs. It has a unique altar room with a revered statue dating back to the seventh century of Jowo Sakyamuni, a larger than life-size statue of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. Over time, several pavilions were added to the temple complex. It is believed the temple was built by a Tibetan King to subdue an ogress that was destroying temples over a vast area stretching to Tibet.

Chimmi Lhakhang – built in 1499 in Punakha, is dedicated to the "Divine Madman", the Tibetan Saint, Lama Drukpa Kunley. The temple is perched on top of a hill, and a short walking distance from the enchanting Sopsokha village. The temple has beautiful murals, and a stunning view of the valleys and mountains that surround it. The temple is also referred to as the "Fertility Temple", as couples struggling to conceive visit the temple to be blessed with fertility. The temple has an album of testimonials from couples from around the world and within Bhutan who were blessed to have babies after visiting the temple. It is not surprising that the temple draws couples from all over Bhutan and around the world. It is a charming place, given the lovely gardens and views that surround it.

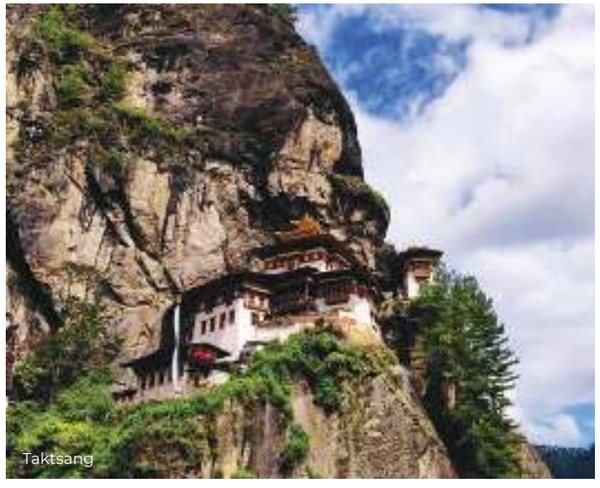
Kurjey Lhakhang – built in 1652 in Bumthang, consists of three revered temples, each rich with history and spiritual importance, namely, Guru Lhakhang, Sampa Lhundrup Lhakang, and Ka Gon Phor Sum Lhakhang. The main temple is named after the body print of Guru Rinpoche, which is preserved in a cave inside the oldest of the three buildings that make up the temple complex. The structures have white-washed walls, and delicate wood carvings and hand-painted wall murals.

Unique Buddhist Temples

Besides famous Buddhist temples, there exist numerous lhakhangs in almost every valley of Bhutan, each with its own unique history, story and characteristics. They serve an important purpose in the community, as they are used for regular worship, blessings, ceremonies, but also to hold important annual rituals and celebrations. It is well worth exploring local temples as well more famous ones, especially if a trip can be timed to gently witness at a respectful distance an annual ritual or celebration. Below is a very small taste of some unique temples in different regions of the country, including one of my favorites in Phobjikha valley. Some are located in and around Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, that are easy to add to any action-packed itinerary.

Khewang Lhakhang – built in the fourteenth century in broad plain of the stunning Phobjikha valley, provides this lhakhang a serene and beautiful location. It located in sparsely inhabited valley that is surrounded by densely forested mountains. The valley is also environmentally protected because it is serves as a conservation site for the famous black-necked cranes who migrate seasonally between the valleys of Bhutan and Tibet. The temple itself features classic timber-and-rammed earth construction, portraying a simple, humble and well-preserved architectural style that can take visitors back in time. The temple houses three large sized statues of The Buddha of the past, present and future, that almost stretch to its roof. A newer temple entrance has been built to extend the temple, and to provide extra space for resident monks to carry out daily chanting and prayers.

Drametse Lhakhang – was built in the sixteenth century in the eastern edge of Mongar district, not far from Trashigang district's border in Eastern Bhutan. Located at 2,100 meters above sea level, it is recognized as the origin of a famous mask dance honoring Padmasambhava, an 8th-century Buddhist saint known as Guru Rinpoche – a dance that is recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural asset. The temple sits on a mountain ridgeline, and comprises a sturdy three-level lhakhang surrounded by other structures in the temple complex. The central temple building is the oldest, and comprises multiple shrine rooms on three levels that house several statutes, including one of Guru Rinpoche, high-ranking lamas, and protective deities. The temple suffered damage following an earthquake in 2009 and was fully repaired by 2022.


Taktsang


Kyichu lhakhang


Chimmi lhakhang


Kurjey Lhakhang



Nabji Lhakhang



Changangkha Lhakhang



Wangditse Lhakhang
Photo: Christopher J/Fynn



Drametse Lhakhang

Nabji Lhakhang – built in the eighth century in Trongsa, the well-preserved temple is a one-storey structure built in the traditional Bhutanese temple design of that time. Prayer wheels are located at its entry, and it has a central temple room. The Lhakhang famously contains a stone pillar with the hand imprint of a local lord, his rival and Guru Rinpoche who negotiated a truce between the warring rivals. It is therefore considered the temple of peace.

Wangditse Lhakhang – built in 1715 high above the Thimphu valley, overlooks the famous Tashichhodzong (temple fortress) further below. Although classified as a temple, it is also sometimes referred as a dzong because of its formidable temple fortress-like appearance. The temple is easy to get to, involving a short hike with popular picnic spots along ridgeline above Thimphu town, which also offers spectacular views of the town below and the surrounding mountains. In 2011, the temple suffered damage following an earthquake, but by 2020 it was reconstructed with references to drawings by Samuel Davis who visited the temple in 1783. The restored temple contains a large gilt copper statue of The Shakyamuni Buddha, with statues of bodhisattvas on either side of it.

Changangkha Lhakhang – was built in thirteenth or fourteenth century in Thimphu on a mountain ridge. The lhakhang follows the natural topography of a mountain ridgeline as its descends in elevation towards Thimphu. The temple is often frequented by parents with small children who seek to obtain blessings from the local protective deity of the temple, considered to be a birth deity and protector of children. At its highest point, are two temple buildings facing one another. The main temple features many prayer wheels, is surrounded by terraces, and features stunning view of Thimphu valley below.

Towards Mindful Travel

There is a deep sense of veneration palpable in Bhutanese lhakhangs. This is discernable, especially if travellers approach their visit to a lhakhang in the same way they would a sacred church in Europe, a Baha'i temple in India, or a mosque in Syria, for instance. Although there are no signboards posted around a lhakhang that instruct visitors to remain quiet, the expected custom is to remain respectful of one's surroundings and give priority to those who have come to worship or carry out spiritual activities within them. In other words, a lhakhang's secondary or tertiary aim is to be destination for tourism. Its primary and higher spiritual aim is to serve as a living, breathing place of worship, practice, sacredness, deference and refuge for Buddhists and followers of Buddhism.

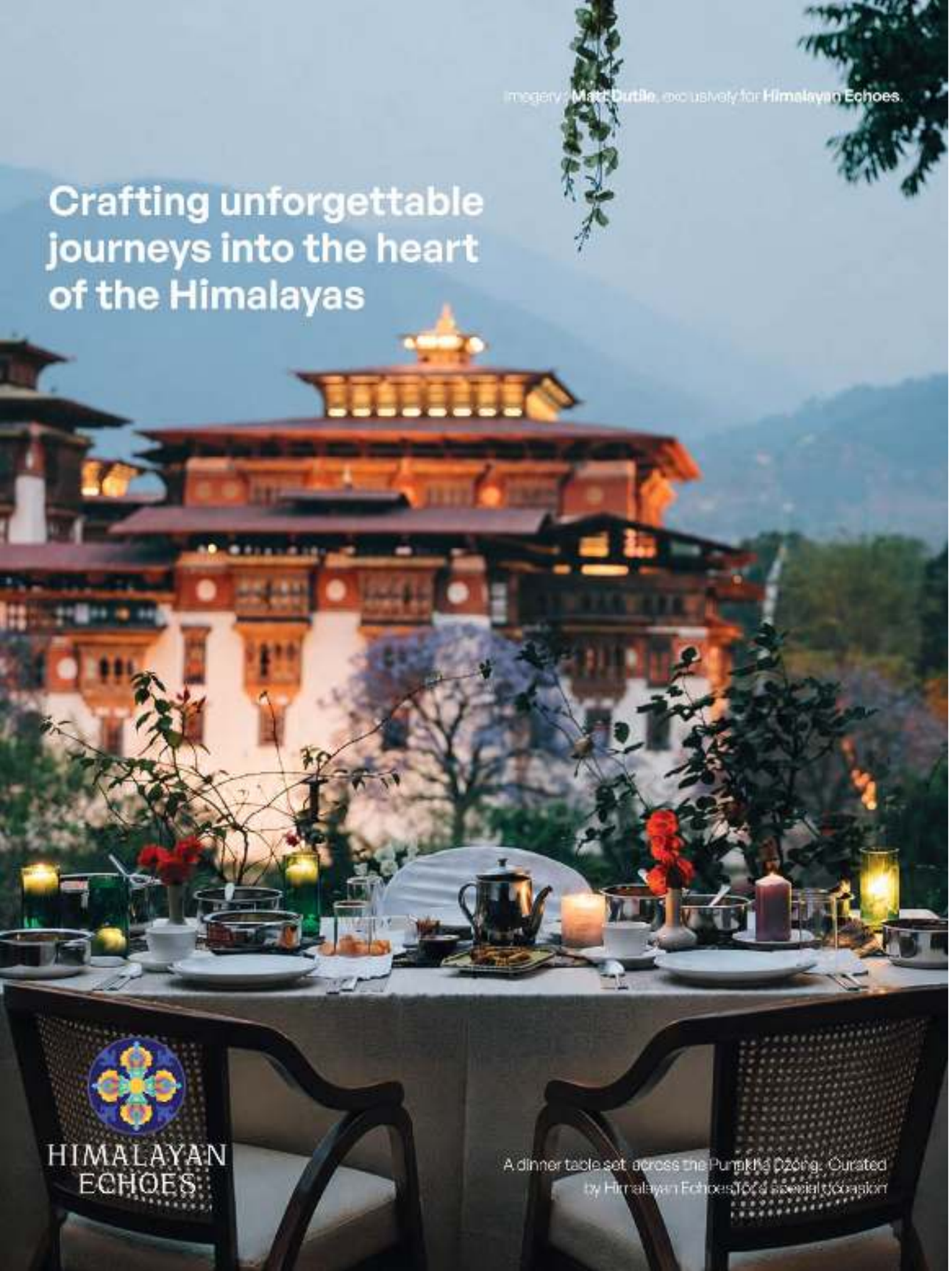
Many lhakhangs in Bhutan feature intricately colorful mural wall paintings. Among them, is the famous painting of the "four friends". The four friends depicts the story of an elephant, monkey, rabbit and bird, each of whom work together collaboratively, in cooperation and dependence on one another to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

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



DR RITU VERMA

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



Imagery by **Matt Dutile**, exclusively for **Himalayan Echoes**.

A dinner table set across the Punakha Dzong. Curated by Himalayan Echoes for a special occasion

Stories Within

"Bhutan photographs beautifully and everybody knows it. The better material is off to one side, in kitchens and car parks and the last ten minutes of daylight, when nobody is trying to show you anything at all. Notes from a travellers journal."

The road east from Thimphu winds up to Dochula Pass before descending towards Punakha. At the summit stand 108 chortens, built in memory of Bhutanese soldiers who lost their lives in 2003-2004. On a clear day, the snow-covered Himalayan peaks stretch across the horizon. Our car stopped for tea.

There is a particular sound Bhutanese drivers make when they overtake on a blind bend, a short double tap on the horn, and after three days you stop hearing it as a warning and start hearing it as a greeting. The dogs of Thimphu, meanwhile, sleep through the entire working day in the middle of pavements, roundabouts and shop doorways, because the town is theirs at night and they need the rest.

We visited a farmhouse in Punakha where the chillies were splayed out on the corrugated roof, drying to the colour of old brick. Downstairs the kitchen had a wood stove, a rice cooker, and a photograph of His Majesty hung at an angle that suggested it had been dusted often. A cup of suja arrived. The cup was refilled before it was half empty, which is what happens, and continues happening, so the trick is to leave a little in the bottom and ook content.

The archery was on the second Sunday. Two teams, a target roughly a hundred and forty-five metres away, small enough from the shooting line to be a rumour rather than a mark. When somebody hit it, his side danced in front of the target and sang, and the song was not about victory. It was about the opposition, in some detail, and the opposition laughed harder than anyone.

Small things accumulate. The way la gets attached to the end of sentences, softening everything, so that even a refusal arrives padded. The men in gho with a smartphone tucked into the fold at the chest, alongside the wallet and, occasionally, lunch.

The monk at Gangtey who was filming the mist coming up the valley on a cracked phone and turned the screen towards me so I could see it was better on video.

Late in the trip, in a village whose name I have written down twice and spelled differently both times, an old woman was walking a slow circuit around a chorten. Prayer wheel in the right hand, beads in the left, both moving without her attention. She had presumably done this some thousands of times. I fell in behind her for a few laps. Nobody noticed.

By the time we got back to the car the mountain had gone. Not into cloud, just gone, the way the light goes here, all at once and without discussion, and we drove down in the dark with the windows open because the air was worth it.

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In Bhutan, the wedding is only part of the story. The memories people carry home are often made before and after it; in monastery courtyards, on mountain paths, and around long tables shared with family.



Bhutan does not go over the top. It does unforgettable. A blessing ceremony led by monks in a seventeenth-century dzong. Dinner on a lodge terrace as the mountains fade from pink to black. Lunch in a farmhouse where somebody's grandmother decides she likes your mother. A vow renewal beside a river that has been considered sacred for centuries, with eleven guests and no photographer unless you want one.

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Guardians of the Himalayas

The workshop where ancient legends come to life. Before the drums, before the crowds, before the courtyard fills at first light, somebody sits alone with a block of wood and decides what the Lord of Death should look like.

A Tshechu, Bhutan's most important religious festival, honours Guru Rinpoche, who brought Vajrayana Buddhism to the Himalayas. It is where ancient legends come alive, where every masked dance carries centuries of sacred meaning, and where travellers witness one of the world's last great living spiritual traditions.
It all begins here.

Sawdust, first. It hangs in the light through the shutters, settles on the tea, and by afternoon it has settled on you too. The carver is shaping a mouth. Mouths take the longest. Everything a wrathful face must express is decided there, where the wood has been pared back thin enough to split if the chisel loses patience.

Then comes the block. The back is hollowed so a dancer can wear the mask for hours beneath the autumn sun or spring chill. Cloth, paste, chalk, mineral pigments. The eyes are painted last.





















Picture by Adam Dean for Department of Tourism, Bhutan

That is the moment it stops being an object and becomes something to be treated with reverence.

He has carved the same dozen faces for decades. He will carve them again. When festival season arrives, they emerge into the courtyards of Bhutan's dzongs.

There is Shinje, the buffalo-headed Lord of Death. Raksha Mangcham weighs the deeds of the dead. The skeleton dancers, Durdag, clear away what does not belong. The fierce Tungam destroy evil in an act of compassion. The Ging strike one another, then the crowd, driving away misfortune. Guru Tshengye brings stillness as the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche pass through the courtyard. Then comes laughter with Shawa Shachi, before the atsara—Bhutan's irreverent red-faced clowns—mock monks, visitors and themselves while quietly keeping the festival in motion.

Back in the workshop sits another finished mask, complete in every detail except its eyes.

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Russian Café and Bakery Brusnika











Brusnika, a charming café with a beautiful menu, is a testament to the passion of its owners, Tashi and Natalia.

Inspired by the wonderful bakeries and cuisines of their homelands, Bhutan and Russia, Tashi and Natalia realized the need for organic Artisan type breads in Bhutan.

The café had humble beginnings, with Natalia practicing a fusion of Russian style pastries using local grains, including Bhutan's favourite grain, rice! She started to bake for family and friends, and soon dreamed of opening her own bakery.

When Natalia and Tashi found a beautiful place with the most amazing view in town, Russian Cafe and Bakery Brusnika was born. Natalia trained Bhutanese ladies how to bake bread, cakes, and pastries. Now, the cafe and bakery serves a charming menu of continental cuisine infused with Russian flavors.

The bread and pastries are a mix of Russian and German, a simple homage to the Bhutanese-Russian family's personal history. Natalia was born and brought up in Russia, and the couple spent 10 years in Germany.

The concept of food at Brusnika is simple: eat local, eat healthy. The café uses local milk and butter, homemade cheese, jams by Brusnika, organic vegetables and fruits, and avoids processed food as much as possible.

Brusnika is more than just a café; it is a place where people can come together to enjoy delicious food, stunning views, and the warmth of Russian-Bhutanese hospitality.

Come and enjoy healthy, homemade food and incredible views at Brusnika!

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The Phantom Butterfly of Upper Kholong Chhu Valley



Tandin Wangdi

He teaches at a primary school in Trashiyangtse. He spends his free time reading poetry and exploring the surrounding hills, and has spent the past decade bringing students into the field to build an early love of the natural world. His essays and photographs have previously appeared in Tashi Delek Magazine.

In late July the Kholong Chuu runs the color of steeped tea, swollen with snowmelt and monsoon rain, and along its banks the aristolochia vines climb through nettle and bramble toward whatever sun reaches the valley floor. Somewhere in that tangle, if the season is right, you might find a caterpillar banded in orange and black working its way along a leaf edge, or catch the adult itself crossing the trail: wings black as wet slate, with cream, a flush of red at the trailing tips of the hindwings. Here, in this narrow reach of Trashiyangtse [illegible] and the high pastures of the scattered places, that this swallowtail keeps to a small handful of ridges it does never, so far as anyone knows, left Lepidop-

Ludlow's Bhutan Swallowtail Butterfly in Trashiyangtse

terists call it Bhutanitis ludlowi. For most of the last century, they called it something closer to a ghost.

Frank Ludlow and George Sherriff came this way first, in the last days of July 1933, plant hunters by trade and by temperament, working their way north up the Kholong Chhu on the first of four marches toward Shingbe and the Me La, into ground that no botanist before them had mapped. They would later set down, in a diary published long afterward as "A Quest of Flowers", that the day carried a heat gentled by a steady wind, and that of every valley either man had crossed in the kingdom, this one, opening wide beneath Dong La with the Trashiyangtse river cutting through it, struck them as the finest. They camped that night near the stupa at Chorten Kora before continuing on toward Tobrang.

The push to Tobrang cost them little beyond the ordinary misery of the season. Even above ten thousand feet the leeches found them; Sherriff, pulling off his stockings one evening, counted four still working at his skin. It was somewhere along that stretch, in the first days of August, that the two men netted several specimens of a swallowtail neither had seen described anywhere, striking enough on the wing to be worth the trouble of pinning and packing, though butterflies were never their real purpose. Years later it would carry Ludlow's name. At the time it was simply one more specimen for the day's tally.

By the thirteenth of August they had pushed on through Shingphel and the high ground around Me La and were ready to leave Tobrang for Tibet. Sherriff, writing a week earlier, noted with some amusement that the nomads they met along the way had decided the two Englishmen were collecting butterflies to dye their own clothes, a guess he allowed their filthy shirts and trousers may have earned. It is a small line, easy to miss between records of plant lists and altitudes, but it does something the rest of the diary does not: it turns two figures out of an old colonial expedition into men who were tired, muddy, and still capable of laughing at themselves.

The butterfly they netted that August all but disappeared from the record for most of the century that followed. Its wings were striking enough to have made it a name among collectors worldwide, and yet almost nothing was known of how it lived, what it ate as a larva, where its range began and where it ended. Specialists took to calling it the phantom butterfly, a species known mostly by rumor and by a scatter of pinned specimens in old collections, more myth than moth by the time most people had stopped looking.

Then, in 2009, a Bhutanese forester/ranger named



Baychen Village in Yangtse Valley



Yangtse valley in monsoon



Autumn is the ideal season for watching butterflies in Trashiyangtse

Karma Wangdi found it again at Tobrang, alive on the same ground Ludlow and Sherriff had crossed nearly eighty years before. He had been following a tip from an Italian entomologist, Gian Cristoforo Bozano, who suspected the butterfly might still be holding on somewhere in the Trashiyangtse hills, and he was right. A species presumed gone for most of a century, found again where it had first been described: it was the kind of story that made both national papers and the international scientific press, and it marked a milestone in Bhutanese conservation that people here still talk about.

Two years later the story landed, quite literally, on the football ground of my old high school (Baylling Higher Secondary School). A group of Japanese lepidopterists from the Butterfly Society of Japan arrived that autumn with a camera crew from NHK World, and their helicopter set down in a cloud of dust and flattened grass right where we used to play. None of us had any idea why. My friends who were still in school at the time remember it as pure spectacle: even the teachers stood around baffled while a group of outsiders climbed out of a helicopter that had appeared from nowhere, and every student in reach wanted only to get close enough for a photograph at the open door. The butterfly that had drawn them there meant nothing to us yet. We just wanted the picture.

I learned what it meant the following year, watching the evening news on BBS at a friend's place in Paro. I knew almost no butterflies by name then, but something about the story, a species gone for most of eight decades and rediscovered exactly where it was first collected, would not leave me alone. That same year my friend and I traveled to Trashiyangtse and walked into Tobrang with a forest ranger and a forester as guides, hunting not adults on the wing but the quieter evidence of them: caterpillars working along the aristolochia leaves and small clutches of eggs laid on the undersides, easy to miss unless you already knew where to look. I did not, yet. That trip taught me.

In the years since, smartphones and a flood of information online have done what decades of formal survey work could not manage alone. Sightings, credited to travelers, nature guides, and forest rangers who were not even looking for the butterfly, have turned up well beyond that original stretch of Tobrang: in Bumthang, in Trashigang, across the border in the Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary of Arunachal Pradesh. Even inside Trashiyangtse, outside any protected area, villages like Bimkhar and Baney now hold their own records of a species still officially endangered and still, by any reasonable measure, rare. Bhutan has turned up close to a hundred species new to science or new to its own records over the past quarter century, a run of discovery few countries its size can claim. None of them, to my mind, changed how people here thought about their own hills the way this one did.

Bhutan named it the national butterfly in 2012, the same year I first went looking for it, and it carries other names besides Bhutanitis ludlowi: Ludlow's Bhutan Glory, the Mystical Bhutan Glory, names that trail a little of that old rumor and reverence behind them. August and September are still the months to go, when mist sits low over the upper reaches of Bumdeling Valley, inside Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary, and whatever population survives the monsoon comes out to bask between showers. It remains confined, so far as anyone can tell, to a stretch of the eastern Himalaya small enough to walk across in a few long days.

I have gone back to Tobrang many times since that first visit, often enough that when I finally read Ludlow and Sherriff's own account of the place, I recognized it before I had finished the page: the wind cutting the heat, the valley opening below Dong La, the long climb toward Chorten Kora. In July of 2023 I walked their route again, from Tobrang up through Shingphel toward Me La, and the path did to me exactly what it must have done to them. By the time I reached the high pastures I was coated in mud from the knees down, the same kind of mud, more or less, that once convinced a group of Tibetan nomads that two Englishmen were harvesting butterflies to dye their filthy clothes. Reading Sherriff's line about it used to feel like a curiosity from an old expedition report. Standing in that same mud ninety years later, it felt like something closer to company.

I have spent the last decade taking students up that same valley, watching them find, the way I once did, a caterpillar coiled on an aristolochia leaf or the sudden flash of black and cream wings crossing the trail ahead through Viburnum cylindricum bushes. I have not always been patient about it; more than one trip has run long because I would not turn back until someone in the group had seen one for themselves. But I have watched it open the same door in them that it opened in me at Tobrang in 2012, and once that door is open, the rest of the wild country tends to follow them through it.







BHUTAN'S QUIET COFFEE REVIVAL

From Samtse's hillsides to Gelephu Mindfulness City: the journey of Bhutan Mountain Coffee

In Pemaling Gewog in Samtse in southern Bhutan, there were hillsides where coffee trees once grew for no one. Farmers had planted them at the government's urging, decades ago, and then watched the cherries ripen and rot, because there was nowhere to sell them and no one to process them. The coffee trees survived; the idea of coffee as a livelihood did not.

By the time Karma Chime arrived in the village in 2016, coffee had failed to capture the imagination of the rural farmers. The biggest problem he was confronted with was not agronomic but reputational. He had to convince the farmers to take up something that had actually failed, and quiet miserably. He had to talk people out of their own experience.

He did it with saplings, extension visits, and a single guarantee the earlier effort had never made: that somebody would buy what they grew – a small promise that turned a farmer's labor from a private bet into a shared one.

Once a few households in Pemaling tested that promise and found it held, others followed. Dozens became hundreds.

Today, Bhutan Mountain Coffee works with more than a thousand farming households, across several hundred acres, and has moved into owning the whole chain itself: growing, processing, roasting and selling coffee under its own name, so that the money a bag of Bhutanese coffee earns mostly stays in Bhutan, rather than being exported as green beans and returning, marked up, as someone else's finished product.

That vertical reach now shows up on the high street. Mountain Café, the company's own chain of coffee houses, has become the public face of the business in Thimphu and beyond, while its retail









Coffee Capsules available both in
bio-degradable and aluminium cups





range of roasted beans, ground coffee and single-origin lines has begun travelling further than the farms that grow it, into hotels, gift shops and export markets willing to pay for traceable Arabica.

The company's real subject, though, was never only coffee, but who gets to stay. Bhutan's rural south has been losing people to Thimphu and to jobs abroad for years, the usual pattern in a fast-urbanising country. Bhutan Mountain Coffee's answer has been to make staying pay: cherry-picking income for farming families, jobs at Mountain Café outlets, where women make up most of the staff, and a foothold in a trade that barely existed locally a decade ago.

The farming method fits the same logic. The coffee is grown under forest canopy rather than on cleared land, keeping the shade trees standing – an approach that suits both Bhutan's conservation instincts and a market that pays for a good origin story.

In Bhutan, that story arrives unusually intact: Gross national happiness is not a marketing conceit here so much as the operating premise, and shade-grown beans from carbon-negative forest are what that premise looks like as a cash crop.

That alignment is now pulling the company towards Gelephu, where His Majesty the King is building a new Special Administrative Region – the Gelephu Mindfulness City – organised around the same idea: that an economy can be built for growth and for well-being at once.

Bhutan Mountain Coffee, whose whole model has been a bet on that proposition at village scale, is a natural tenant for a city trying to prove it at national scale.

Bhutan Mountain Coffee
Contact : +975 16933333/17111731
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www.bhutanmountaincoffee.com













Yojay Sharing the Practice of Prayer

The offering of alms is a sacred Buddhist practice which offers people the opportunity to earn eternal merit through their generosity. Known from the time of the Buddha himself, this custom has evolved into a popular cultural tradition in Bhutan, the home of Vajrayana Buddhism. Along with the emergence of Gelephu Mindfulness City, a modern center for the global Buddhist community, Bhutan structures the governance of this ancient tradition to be relevant to current and future times.

The Sanskrit term, from the Vinaya sutra, is sanghadāna, meaning alms for the spiritual community, practiced by Gautama Buddha. The iconic image of simply clad Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia walking the streets, or door-to-door, carrying alms bowls that people fill with food and other offerings, is a familiar one. Often misunderstood, or inadequately described as "begging", the profound significance of this practice is that people are offered the opportunity to earn merit by offering alms.

In Bhutan, the Choekey term for offering alms is *yojay*, synonymously a gesture of prayer, an expression of compassion and generosity. It is a telling example of intuitive value mindfully rationalized into the functioning of society.

This powerful gesture of humility and reverence evolved in Bhutan into an organic system. Over the centuries, Bhutanese society nurtured this as a living custom of devotion, with the monastic community, Kings and the Royal family, patrons and communities offering land, resources, and endowments for the continuity of dharma and preservation of spiritual heritage.

The tradition continues today and offerings, in cash and kind, sustain the interdependence and harmony of the spiritual and lay communities. The age-old ceremonies and rituals are an essence of transformation and nation building. When Bhutan initiated a monumental shift of gender equality in the Buddhist world, with the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot) ordaining gelongmas (Buddhist nuns) in 2025, thousands of Bhutanese devotees crowded the main street of Thimphu to offer alms to more than 260 nuns.

Yojay in Modern Times

Today, it is His Majesty The King's royal vision to preserve and expand the practice of prayer into a trusted institutional platform that enables individuals and communities worldwide to participate in a spiritually inspired system of generosity and compassion. As Bhutan transforms into a new era, local traditions expand as well-meaning devotees give a local custom global relevance.

Such a tradition is particularly constructive in a rapidly changing world that is grappling with concerns of moral decline, conflict, and suffering. Changing social patterns, increased globalisation, and demographic shifts raise the need for professional governance, financial accountability, and continuity of monastic welfare. Financial participation, today, requires a structured, transparent, and accessible mechanism to be sustained.

Youth personify the absence, or dilution, of unquestioning faith that served past generations. They demand a clearer validation of the spiritual and cultural significance of *yojay* that differ from the directness of their work culture. Changing economic bases like urbanization and reduced land endowments create the need for predictable support and active stewardship.

Yojay is a culture of devotion which, like ceremonies and rituals, are not events but expressions of sacredness. Fundamentally, it is mindfulness. The outward offering is a reminder to look inward and be mindful that generosity and interdependence is a shared mandate for all.

Emerging Institutional Landscape

Different religions and faiths around the world teach and develop cultural practices to achieve spiritual goals, be it salvation, or freedom from cycle of rebirth, or simply the weighing of good and bad actions.

Buddhist civilizations developed strong systems of patronage and endowment to ensure that the dharma and monastic institutions could thrive: there was Royal and community support for monasteries in ancient India; the priest-patron relationship in Tibet; Bhutan's own tradition of collective support established with the concept of nationhood by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.

Bhutanese devotees offer property, ritual objects, monetary and material gifts, and other resources that they value. The practice of *yojay* is purely voluntary, the real value being the intention, not the quantity. Not to be associated with commercial fundraising campaigns, *yojay* is now a structured and transparent channel that enables devotees to make offerings primarily as an act of devotion intended to earn merit and receive blessings.

Yojay, today, is governed by a progressive partnership between the Zhung Dratshang (Central Monk Body) and Gerab Nyed-Yon Limited (an investment arm of the dratshang). The Zhung Dratshang retains spiritual authority, ritual oversight, welfare execution responsibility, and stewardship of the sacred offering system while Gerab Nyed-Yon Limited provides professional financial management, investment oversight, accounting systems, and audit assurance.

Connecting Global Devotees

Bhutan's Vajrayana lineage and Zhung Dratshang's custodianship confer unique and unbroken spiritual depth that reaches devotees everywhere. A secure, multilingual digital ecosystem enables devotees to participate in *yojay* offerings from anywhere in the world: they support specific rituals; request prayers and spiritual services; receive official digital acknowledgements; maintain a personal history of contributions and participation; and cultivate merit and blessings.

The modern *yojay* initiative connects all devotees and well-wishers with authentic monastic practices and ensures that every contribution is managed with transparency, accountability, and spiritual integrity. The offerings are a shared global commitment to sustain the Buddhist clergy, preserve sacred traditions, and sustain the partnership between the spiritual and lay communities. For Bhutan, all this helps safeguard the national identity.

The concept is not new. Friends of Bhutan and Bhutanese, including former ambassadors and diplomats, send offerings to Bhutan long after they have left, maintaining a connection with Bhutan's living traditions. And devotees maintain their lifelong connections with practices and institutions in Bhutan.

Conclusion

The wisdom of evolving with the times is to ensure that this sacred practice continues in a rapidly changing world. The initiative does not replace traditional practices. Instead, it provides a trusted modern pathway through which the same devotion, generosity, and compassion can continue to flourish through strong institutional governance, professional financial management, secure digital infrastructure, transparent stewardship, and global accessibility.

A thriving *yojay* tradition safeguards Bhutan's spiritual heritage and creates a sustainable foundation for generations to come. It establishes Bhutan as a global example of how ancient wisdom traditions can responsibly embrace modern innovation while preserving their sacred essence in perpetuity.



DASHO KINLEY DORJI

He is, by education and interest, a journalist.

HIGH QUALITY THANGKA

Traditional Arts & Crafts



*“Every **Thangka** Tells a Story- Make One Yours.”*

The High Quality Thangka Painting experience offers guests a rare opportunity to immerse themselves in Bhutan’s rich artistic and spiritual heritage. Rooted in centuries-old traditions, this exclusive hands-on experience combines authenticity, craftsmanship, and cultural storytelling, allowing visitors to connect deeply with the skills, techniques, and devotion behind this sacred art form

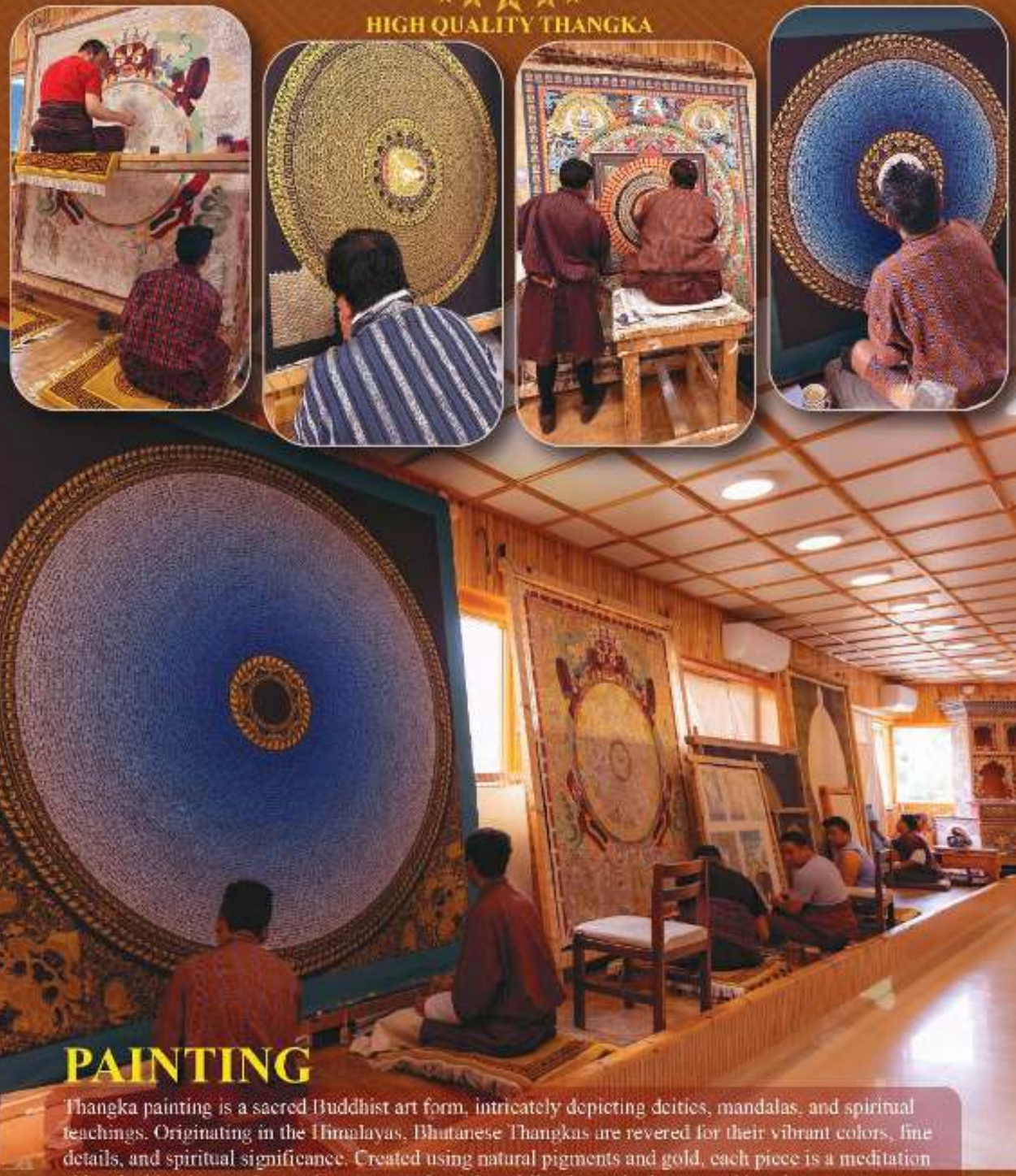
At our arts and crafts studio, guests will enjoy a personalized and meaningful journey into the world of Thangka painting, experiencing the precision, symbolism, and artistic mastery that make each creation unique.

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HIGH QUALITY THANGKA



PAINTING

Thangka painting is a sacred Buddhist art form, intricately depicting deities, mandalas, and spiritual teachings. Originating in the Himalayas, Bhutanese Thangkas are revered for their vibrant colors, fine details, and spiritual significance. Created using natural pigments and gold, each piece is a meditation aid and a blessing. Artists undergo years of training, following strict iconographic rules to ensure accuracy. Thangkas are used in rituals, festivals, and personal devotion, embodying Bhutan’s rich Buddhist heritage. At our studio, witness this ancient craft and explore the harmony of art and spirituality that defines Bhutanese culture. Our artists are accomplished masters with decades of painting experiences. Visitors can watch these master artists in action as they their masterpieces.

HIGH QUALITY THANGKA

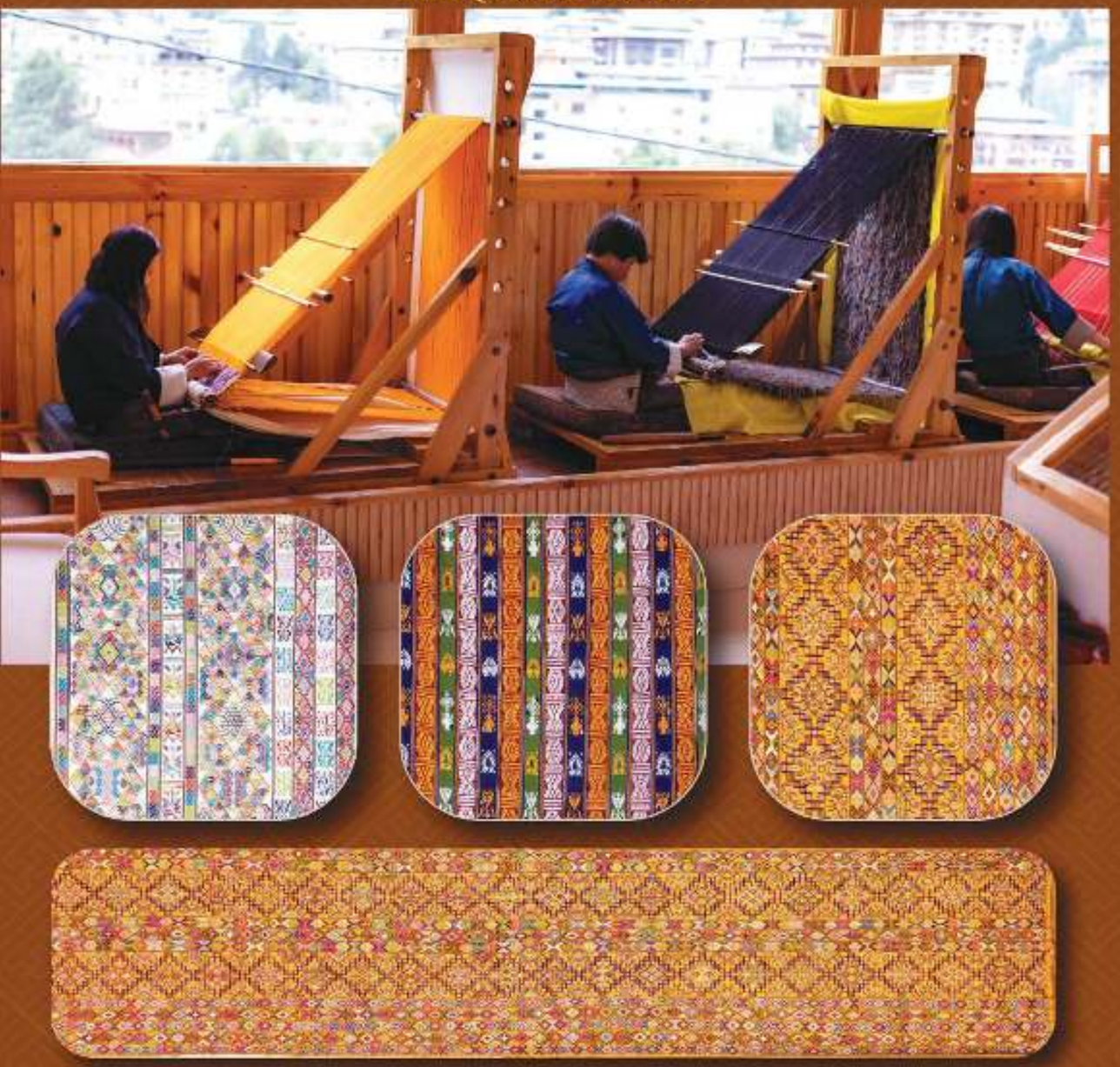
WOOD & SLATE CARVING

Discover the timeless artistry of Bhutanese wood and slate carving, where centuries-old craftsmanship meets spiritual tradition. Skilled artisans transform sustainably sourced wood and natural slate into intricate works inspired by Buddhist symbolism and nature, featuring motifs such as lotus flowers, dragons, and sacred deities. From architectural details and decorative panels to sculptures, household items, and engraved slate art, every piece reflects Bhutan's rich cultural heritage and artistic excellence. At our studio, watch master artisans bring these creations to life using techniques passed down through generationsake home an authentic piece of Bhutan's enduring legacy.

HIGH QUALITY THANGKA

SCULPTING & MASK CARVING

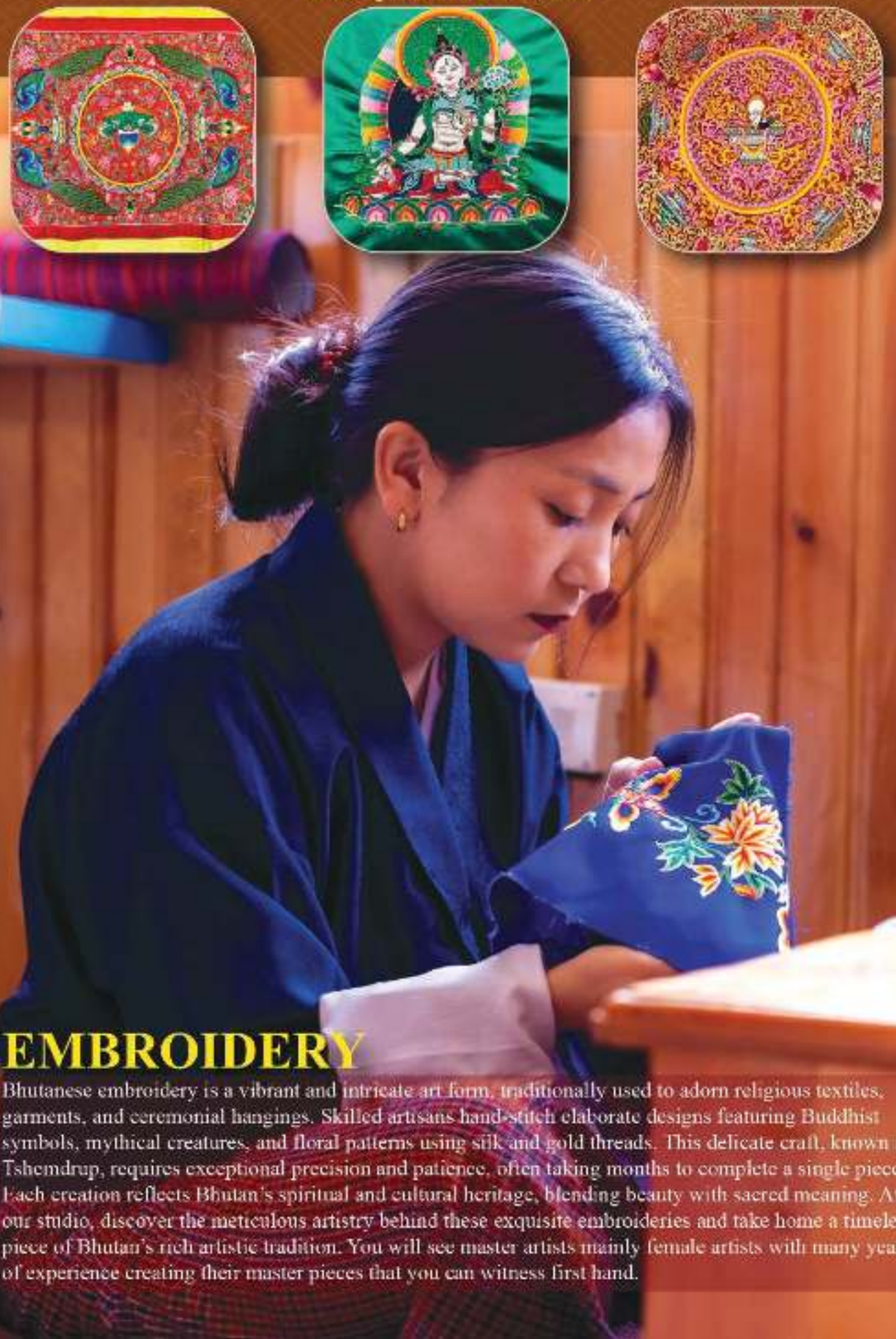
Discover Bhutan's rich spiritual artistry through its sacred sculptures, ceremonial masks, and iconic phallus carvings. Skilled master artisans handcraft bronze, clay, wood, and papier-mâché into intricate Buddhas, deities, saints, mythical beings, and symbolic works rooted in Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. Created using centuries-old techniques such as lost-wax casting, hand carving, and natural pigments, each piece reflects deep spiritual devotion, cultural heritage, and exceptional craftsmanship. At our studio, witness these living traditions firsthand as master artists bring Bhutan's sacred art to life, and take home an authentic expression of the Kingdom's timeless culture.



WEAVING

Experience the living heritage of Bhutanese weaving, where vibrant threads transform into exquisite textiles rich with cultural meaning. Using backstrap and frame looms,master weavers create intricate patterns like the iconic kushuthara (brocade) and yathra (woolen tapestry), each design carrying ancestral stories and spiritual symbolism. Made with locally sourced silk, cotton, and wool, these textiles are dyed with natural pigments and woven with meticulous precision. From ceremonial garments to everyday wear, every piece reflects Bhutan's artistic soul. At our studio, witness this timeless craft and take home a woven treasure infused with Bhutan's colors and traditions. Our master weavers have decades of experience and knowledge passed on from their parents at very early age growing up in the villages.

HIGH QUALITY THANGKA



EMBROIDERY

Bhutanese embroidery is a vibrant and intricate art form, traditionally used to adorn religious textiles, garments, and ceremonial hangings. Skilled artisans hand-stitch elaborate designs featuring Buddhist symbols, mythical creatures, and floral patterns using silk and gold threads. This delicate craft, known as Tshemdrup, requires exceptional precision and patience, often taking months to complete a single piece. Each creation reflects Bhutan's spiritual and cultural heritage, blending beauty with sacred meaning. At our studio, discover the meticulous artistry behind these exquisite embroideries and take home a timeless piece of Bhutan's rich artistic tradition. You will see master artists mainly female artists with many years of experience creating their master pieces that you can witness first hand.

HIGH QUALITY CAR RENTAL

High Quality Car Rental is a trusted car rental company dedicated to building long-lasting relationships with our clients by delivering exceptional service and excellent value for money. Our goal is to provide reliable, safe, and comfortable vehicles that encourage customers to choose our rental and leasing services time and time again. Our mission is to develop a highly successful and profitable car rental business that consistently provides quality transportation services to both local residents and international tourists. We strive to set the standard for excellence in the car rental industry through professionalism, reliability, and outstanding customer care.

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We are passionate about excellence and committed to maintaining a fleet of reliable, clean, and comfortable vehicles. By combining quality service with competitive pricing, we aim to exceed customer expectations and build lasting trust.

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OUR FLEETS

GWM Tank 500 SUV
(2 to 3 Seater)

Toyota High Roof
(5 to 9 Seater)

Coaster Bus
(15 to 22 Seater)

Toyota Prado SUV
(2 to 3 Seater)

Hyundai H1 Haice
(3 to 6 Seater)















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.



THE ANATOMY OF A BHUTANESE MEAL

What happens around Bhutanese tables at mealtime, you may ask. First surprise: there is no table. Many or even most Bhutanese eat on the floor. They congregate around a lovely wood stove in winter in the kitchen, sitting on sheepskin or beautiful Tibetan rugs.

Everyone is seated in a circle and in the typical Bhutanese home there are at least three, sometimes four generations. Grandmother holds the baby who goes to sleep in her lap.

Everybody just sits where they feel like, but it's in a circle. Younger children are urged to sit next to grandfather, who is loving but does not condone foolishness or dawdling at mealtime. Dogs and cats form the outer perimeter and politely wait for scraps. They clearly know the ropes and have impeccable manners.

Pots come off the stove and go to the center of the circle. A big rice cooker takes center stage and the lady of the house will serve. Guests are



served first, always, and urged at every turn to eat more. Family members are served in reverse hierarchy, and the lady of the house serves herself last. Sometimes the eldest daughter stands in and serves her mother. Either way, the server is last but not least.

Watch out because the main dish and the ema datse are going to be fiery hot. It's an idiosyncrasy of Bhutanese food that can be shocking and painful. Ema, or Bhutanese chillies, are loaded



with vitamin C, and I have a personal theory involving pain, endorphins, and low-grade masochism that would explain a great deal about Bhutanese cheerfulness. Whether that has anything to do with why Bhutanese are so happy, I couldn't say, but I have my suspicions.

Eating with the hands is preferred, if there are no foreign guests to look on in surprise. Bhutanese are very tidy when they eat with their hands. They take a handful of glutinous rice, making a fist and squeezing it in their palms so it forms a tight little oblong ball they can dip into a curry and bite off. Curry in Bhutan is anything wet that goes along with rice. You'll also see a little ball of rice next to each person, about an inch in diameter, that they roll in their hands before eating. This is actually in lieu of hand washing. It isn't hygiene in any real sense, just friction and absorption, the same way a piece of bread mops grease off a counter. Nothing scientific about it. Often the little balls go gray. Think of them as Bhutanese table napkins, but don't put them in your lap.

I don't eat with my hands. I only eat with utensils so as to spare my fellow diners the sight of me with food up to my elbows. Eating with a fork is my superpower. Even the little kids here are quite polished and elegant eating with their hands.

Leftovers are left in the pot, and in the morning they're mixed with a helping of rice and a little oil and maybe an egg, and made into *toetse*, a delicious rice hash-like concoction. Or they become part of a dog's meal, of course.

In the old days people used to carry around little hand-made bowls that they could whip out and use for meals. Rice went in their laps on a piece of cloth, and the wooden bowls were first filled with tea and drunk, then curry to go with the rice. There's a thing called Driglam Namcha, translated as "manners of the court," that dictates the proper way to eat, especially in the proximity of royalty.

When Namgay and I were friends and colleagues teaching at the National Art School of Bhutan, he invited me to his family's home for the first time. It was for lunch on a Sunday afternoon. When I came into the house, bringing with me a tin of Danish butter cookies (every guest must bring a gift), he introduced me to his mother, his sister, and his nephew, and I was ushered into the family's *choeshom*, the temple room. I was an honored guest, so I got to sit in the best room of the house, albeit on the floor. Every Bhutanese home has one, a small room or a whole floor set aside from daily life, cabinets lined with statues of the Buddha and various deities, butter lamps flickering even at midday on the altar, the air thick with the smell of juniper incense. It's the quietest, most immaculate room in any house, and I was sitting on its floor. His sister brought me delicious milk tea and snacks: *zow* (fried rice), *khabze* (fried sweetened dough), and some fruits, enough food for a couple of meals, but I was a guest, so I got the most and best of what they had. Then the main meal came: chicken, ema datse, rice, mushrooms, sautéed fiddlehead ferns, I don't remember what all, but it was a lot. It felt like I was eating on the equivalent of the good china, and I didn't know the rules. I tucked in and suddenly realized I was alone. Where was







everybody else? I got up and walked into the kitchen, and there they all were, sitting nicely in the middle of an ancient kitchen, the floorboards blackened and polished by years of cooking and sweeping, sitting on rugs near the wood stove with all the pots in the center. "I want to eat with you!" I said. They smiled and laughed sheepishly and made room for me in the circle.

Eating a Bhutanese meal is fast and efficient, and there's not much conversation. They get right down to the business of eating. If you invite someone to your house for a meal, they expect to linger a bit before, eating snacks and drinking tea and chatting, but after the meal they're out of there pretty fast. There isn't much talk, but there's plenty of noise. In the villages, and not necessarily in the proper corners of Thimphu, you'll hear lots of sucking and chewing and gulping and “ahhhh's". Early in my life in Bhutan, a meal in Bumthang was particularly memorable, when I was invited by the caretaker of a temple to eat with his family. We sat in the kitchen near the wood stove in the traditional arrangement. The caretaker's father was a veritable symphony of noises as he sucked the meat and gristle off a chicken leg, slurped his soup, and took time out to blow his nose on his sleeve. But the crescendo came at the end, when he licked his wooden bowl clean, wrapped it in a cloth, set it under the wood stove in the corner, and let out a loud and lengthy belch. Remember, eating with noise is fine and not impolite.

I really must mention the generosity of the Bhutanese to their guests. If you're visiting here, you will feel it. Even if it's not time to eat, they will try to feed you. Once Namgay and I visited a nunnery in Trongsa and were guided to a reception room where beautiful nuns brought tea and snacks, which we enjoyed. Then, as we were getting up to leave, a parade of nuns in red robes marched in, each carrying a big serving platter of food. Uncharacteristically, there was a table, and they put so many plates of steaming vegetables and rice and noodles on it that one of the legs buckled, and the whole thing would have tumbled onto the floor in a mess if Namgay and one of the nuns hadn't been quick enough to grab it. Only one dish succumbed. That's love. And generosity.





I can't talk about eating in Bhutan without mentioning the refusal dance. If you're offered food, a ride, some money, a college education, you have to refuse politely. Not once. Not twice. Three times. On the fourth time, you can accept whatever is being offered. That's the refusal dance, and it's ubiquitous all over Bhutan. It's the polite thing to do.

All this to say, in our house, things are a little different meal-wise. Namgay and I eat at a table, my nod to my heritage, since I never adapted well to sitting on the floor. I need a surface closer to my mouth. We linger after the meal, too, and our food is different: there's always rice, always, but it's not the main feature the way it is in traditional Bhutanese homes. There's also chicken piccata, or eggs and bacon, or salad or pecan pie.

Table aside, we are traditional in the ways that matter. We embrace the very Bhutanese habit of over-feeding the people we love. It may not be a circle on the kitchen floor, and there might be some western food mixed in, but I hope we can keep being generous enough to loved ones and strangers that we break the odd table, and that we go on showing our love with food.

Ema Datse (Simplified, for Outside Bhutan)

Fill a saucepan with an inch of water. Add chopped onion and tomato, garlic if you feel like it. Add as many chillies as you like, sliced lengthwise so they look like green beans. Add a pinch of salt and about a tablespoon of oil, then put it on a hot stove.

If you're outside of Bhutan, you'll need to simulate datse. Goat cheese works well, along with some American cheese slices or cheddar if you want some sharpness. You can get a little creative with the cheese, but goat cheese should be in the mix.

Don't stir anything. Cover the pan, put it on high heat, and boil for about five minutes, the whole time not stirring. Take it off the heat, then stir to mix the melted cheese with the chillies. Serve over a pile of rice.

You can add mushrooms, potatoes, or any vegetables you like. The cooking is the same.



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.



WHERE BHUTAN'S HERITAGE COMES ALIVE

Where Bhutan's Heritage Comes Alive
Beyond the iconic peaks and fluttering prayer flags, a different kind of magic awaits just outside Thimphu—a place where Bhutan's cultural heartbeat is painted, carved, and woven into life. Welcome to Choki Traditional Art School (CTAS).

This is not a museum of dusty relics. It is a vibrant, living workshop where the future of Bhutan's heritage is being shaped by the hands of its youth. Founded in 1999 as the nation's only charitable private art school, CTAS has a dual mission: to safeguard Bhutan's thirteen traditional arts (the Zorig Chusum) while providing free education and sustainable livelihoods to underprivileged students. Ranked among the Top 2 attractions in Thimphu on TripAdvisor, it offers a rare opportunity to step behind the scenes of Bhutanese culture.

Your Journey Begins with a Blessing
Your visit starts not with a tour, but with a moment of peace. A butter lamp ceremony before the majestic statue of Guru Rinpoche grounds you in the spiritual essence of Bhutan, setting an intention of respect and discovery before you explore the artistic world within.

An Immersive Path Through the Arts
Step inside the classroom of CTAS and you'll find yourself surrounded by a world alive with creative energy. Students bend over canvases, perfecting the delicate strokes of Lhadri (painting). The steady rhythm of chisels brings Patra (woodcarving) to life, while vibrant threads of Tshemdrup (embroidery) and the nimble craft of Tshazo (bamboo weaving) and many other crafts add color and texture to the air. Every corner hums with the sound of tradition being kept alive.

But the true magic lies in participation. Here, you are not just a visitor—you are invited to become part of the story. Pick up a brush and join a mindful painting workshop, learn a stitch in embroidery, weave bamboo under guidance of an instructor, or sculpt a mask alongside senior students. You can even print a lungta (wind horse prayer flag) in the color of your birth element, believed to bring prosperity and good fortune. Each experience leaves you with a handmade souvenir—something personal, meaningful, and unforgettable.

This handson journey transforms a casual stop into a deep connection with Bhutan's artistic soul. It is not only about seeing art—it is about living it, carrying home a piece of Bhutan's heritage etched by your own hands.

A Glimpse into the Past
A short walk leads you to an extraordinary treasure: a 340-year-old ancestral home, consecrated in the 17th century by Druk Desi Tenzin Rabgye. Local lore tells that the site was blessed by the Divine Madman himself, leaving behind sacred stone scriptures and a healing spring water next to the school. Now preserved as a "living heritage home," this house allows you to step back in time and explore the sacred architecture and age-old household spaces that form the bedrock of Bhutanese cultural identity.

Stories Forged in Art
Beyond the beauty of the craft is the profound story of its makers. CTAS opens its doors to youth from humble backgrounds, including those without formal schooling. Here, they acquire not just a skill but a purpose. Alumni of the school can be found painting murals on monastery walls, restoring sacred antiques, and running their own successful studios. Meeting these artists and hearing their stories adds a deeply human dimension to your visit—art becomes a testament to resilience and transformation.

Your Visit Fuels a Purpose
Every guest who walks through the gates of CTAS becomes a patron of living heritage. Your entry fee and purchases directly sustain the school, ensuring that Bhutan's ancient crafts continue to be passed down for generations.

The souvenir shop is more than a place to browse—it is a gallery of authentic artistry. Here you'll find carefully selected works: the finest "Product of the Month" created by students, masterful pieces by alumni, and contributions from local artisans who share the same devotion to tradition. Each item carries a story of skill, culture, and livelihood.

By taking home one of these authentic works, you are not only acquiring a piece of Bhutanese heritage—you are helping provide free education to underprivileged youth, supporting alumni in their professional journeys, and giving local artists a platform to flourish. It is a purchase with purpose, where beauty and impact go hand in hand.

Why CTAS Deserves a Spot on Your Itinerary:

- **Unfiltered Authenticity:** See Bhutan's thirteen traditional arts come alive—not just displayed, but practiced every day.
- **Deep Immersion:** Begin with a blessing, step into a 17thcentury heritage house, and join handson workshops.
- **Meaningful Connections:** Meet the students and artisans whose passion keeps Bhutan's culture thriving.
- **Lasting Impact:** Every visit supports free education, sustains local artists, and helps preserve a living heritage.

A Living Invitation
CTAS is not a relic of the past; it is the vibrant, beating heart of Bhutan's creative future. Whether you have an hour or a day, a visit here offers more than just beautiful memories. You will leave with the spirit of Bhutan's heritage etched into your journey—a reminder that the most profound travel experiences are not just seen, but felt and shared.



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.





Bring your team to Bhutan for an unforgettable incentive journey

MAKE BHUTAN YOUR NEXT MICE DESTINATION

Bhutan is widely known for its mountain landscapes, sacred monasteries, traditional architecture, and deeply rooted culture. Yet beyond its natural beauty lies something far rarer: an environment that inspires reflection, strengthens relationships and encourages meaningful connections.

As one of the few countries where Vajrayana Buddhism remains deeply woven into everyday life, Bhutan offers an atmosphere unlike anywhere else. Sacred mountains, active monasteries, meditation caves and ancient pilgrimage sites are not preserved as relics of the past—they continue to shape the lives of the people who call Bhutan home. This spiritual foundation creates a destination where people naturally slow down, reflect, gain clarity and connect more deeply with one another.

It is this unique setting that makes Bhutan more than a holiday destination. It is an inspiring place for corporate meetings, leadership retreats, incentive travel, destination weddings and carefully designed group programmes that leave a lasting impression.

More Than a Meeting Venue

A successful MICE program is not defined by the meeting room alone. It is shaped by the conversations, shared experiences and connections that take place throughout the journey.

Bhutan allows organizations to combine productive meetings with cultural experiences, nature-based activities and carefully planned incentive programs.

A strategy meeting in Thimphu can be followed by traditional archery, a guided heritage walk or a private Bhutanese dinner. A leadership retreat in Punakha can include focused discussions, monastery visits and time in the valley. An incentive program can bring together Bhutan's key attractions, local cuisine, wellness activities and experiences designed to reward and engage participants.

This makes Bhutan particularly suitable for companies that want their event to feel purposeful, personal and different from a standard corporate trip.

Designed Around Your Objectives

Every MICE group has different priorities. Some organizations may want a private executive retreat with time for planning and discussion. Others may be arranging an incentive journey to recognize performance, strengthen relationships or motivate teams. Larger groups may require meeting facilities, coordinated transport, dining arrangements and a balanced program of business and leisure activities.

Each program can be tailored to the organization's objectives, group size, schedule, activity level and preferred standard of accommodation.

Flights, visas, accommodation, transport, guides, meeting venues, meals and activities can be coordinated through one experienced team. This reduces planning complexity for organizers and gives participants a smoother journey from arrival to departure.

Extend the Experience

Bhutan also gives participants the opportunity to extend their stay before or after the main program.

A delegate may choose to spend additional time in Paro, visit Punakha or explore Bhutan at a slower pace. Senior leaders may add private touring, while incentive travelers may extend the trip with cultural, nature or wellness experiences.

These individual extensions can be arranged alongside the main group program, including flights, visas, accommodation, guides and customized itineraries. This gives companies greater flexibility while allowing participants to make more of their time in Bhutan.

About MICE Bhutan

MICE Bhutan is a division of Druk Asia, one of Bhutan's leading travel agencies. It was created to support companies, event planners and incentive organizers planning programs in Bhutan.

Druk Asia is an official representative of Drukair in Singapore and provides end-to-end Bhutan travel services. Its strong ground network, destination knowledge and decades of experience allow MICE Bhutan to coordinate both the business and travel elements of each program through one point of contact.

MICE Bhutan can support:

- Corporate meetings and conferences
- Leadership and executive retreats
- Incentive and reward travel
- Team-building programs
- Private group journey
- Destination weddings and private celebrations
- Curated cultural, dining, wellness and nature-based experiences.
- Leisure events, celebrations, and social gatherings

For organizers, this means fewer suppliers to manage and clearer coordination throughout the journey. For participants, it means a well-planned Bhutan experience supported from the first enquiry to the final departure.

The MICE Bhutan team has managed high-profile projects for government delegations, global organizations, corporate groups, and private clients, including the United Nations and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

One Destination, Lasting Value

Bhutan gives companies the opportunity to bring people together in a setting that supports focus, connection and shared discovery.

With thoughtful planning and experienced local support, a Bhutan MICE program can meet business objectives while delivering a journey participants will value and remember.

Plan your program with MICE Bhutan and prepare for the journey with the Bhutan Travelog guidebook.

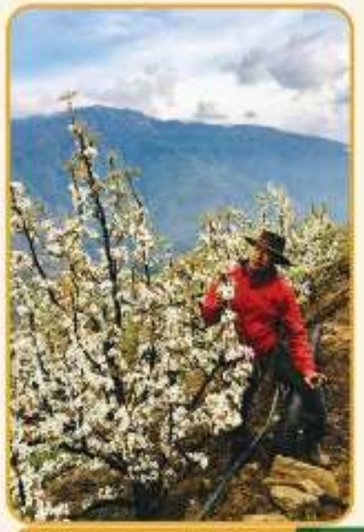
Visit www.micebhutan.com to discuss a customized MICE program, and explore www.bhutantravelog.com to learn more about Bhutan and prepare your participants for the journey.



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  Guided by renowned Buddhist masters
- **Wellness, Yoga & Herbal Bath**
  Restore balance in the mountain air







Meet the Founder — Dorji

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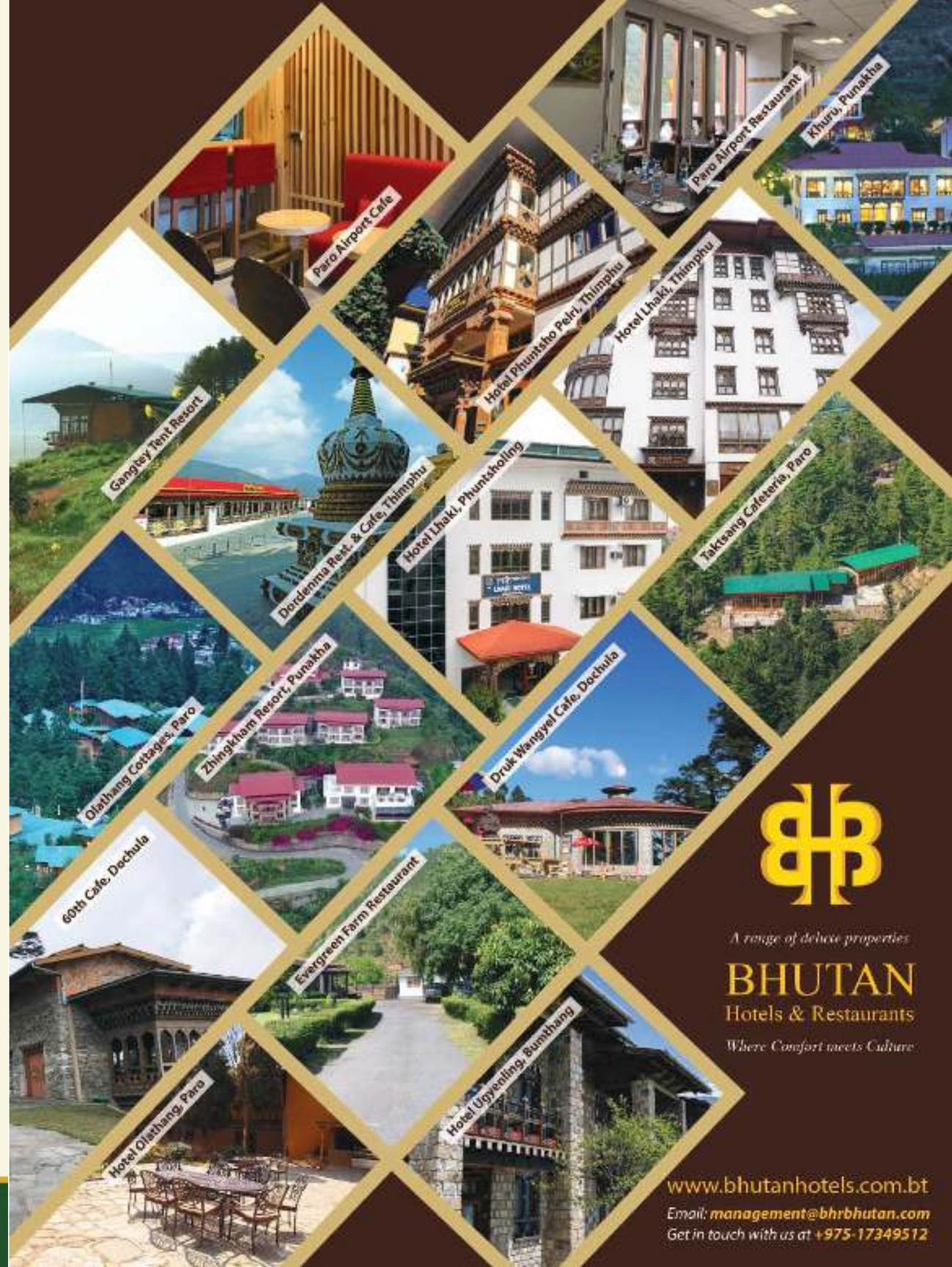
Affectionately known as "Digital Dorji," our founder is a true environmentalist driven by self-sufficiency, uplifting farmers and local communities. A Guinness World Record contributor and Smithsonian Folklife Festival Coordinator (2008), he now lives his happiest chapter as a passionate farmer — ever grateful to Bhutan's visionary Kings, whose wisdom has made the kingdom a true haven where all beings thrive in freedom.

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Dancing with Impermanence

Inside Thimphu Tshechu

The word tshechu means “tenth day”, referring to the tenth day of the lunar month, and commemorates Guru Rinpoche — Padmasambhava, the Lotus-Born — the eighth century tantric master who brought Vajrayana Buddhism to Bhutan and the wider Himalayas.

One reason the festivals are held on this day is that Guru Rinpoche is believed to have been miraculously born from a lotus on the tenth day of the sixth lunar month. He also vowed to manifest blessings on this day each month, making it especially auspicious for practice and meritorious acts.

The tenth day of each month is also associated with a different episode of his life — his birth in one cycle, his subjugation of hostile forces in another, his arrival in the Himalayan region in yet another. To honour these sacred associations, Bhutanese monasteries began holding annual gatherings on the tenth day of specific lunar months, each commemorating a significant event in his life.

Thimphu Tshechu, as a formal festival, was established in 1670 by the fourth temporal ruler of Bhutan, Tenzin Rabgye. More than three centuries later, it still draws large crowds to the capital.

On the anointed day, the courtyard of Tashichhodzong fills early. Families spread blankets on the stone steps, the elderly turn their prayer beads in the chilled morning air, and children scramble for vantage points. By the time the first drums sound — low and resonant, felt as much as heard — the crowd is already dense, the atmosphere charged with anticipation and reverence.

What they have gathered to witness is the *chham* dance. These are not performances for entertainment but sacred acts, understood as embodied forms of meditation and means of accumulating merit. Rather than stories acted out on a stage, they enact enlightened qualities and sacred forces, giving form to themes such as the transformation of anger into compassion and confusion into wisdom.

A number of dances are central to the Thimphu Tshechu: Guru Tshengye depicts the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, including his wrathful form Dorji Drolo, and guides the audience through a symbolic journey of spiritual transformation. The Shana Chham, or Black Hat Dance, is performed to invoke protective deities and dispel obstructing forces, representing the transformation of perception through ritual.

The Durdag Chham appears with particular force. Performers in skeleton masks — white-boned, grinning, and charged with vibrant energy — leap and spin through the courtyard with striking lightness. Their dance depicts the durdag, the lords of the charnel grounds, ritual figures associated with impermanence and death. It evokes the understanding that all compounded things are subject to change and will eventually dissolve. The grinning masks and exuberant, soaring movements give the performance a quality that is at once playful and unsettling.

The Shawo Shachi enacts the conversion to Buddhism of the hunter Gonpo Dorji by the esteemed yogi Milarepa. Gonpo Dorji,



accompanied by his hounds, is pursuing a deer when he encounters Milarepa meditating in the mountains. Calmed by the yogi's radiating compassion, the deer takes refuge beside him. When the hounds arrive, they too fall under the influence of his presence and lie down quietly.

Gonpo Dorji arrives enraged and draws an arrow, threatening to shoot Milarepa, but as he releases it, the arrow snaps and falls harmlessly to the ground. The yogi remains completely still throughout — not from defiance, but from a deep realization of the empty nature of self and phenomena. It is precisely this fearlessness, born of wisdom rather than courage, that stops the hunter in his tracks.

The contrast between his own rage and Milarepa's unshakeable calm creates a crack in his hardened mind. Milarepa then chants verses on impermanence, the karmic consequences of taking life, and the possibility of liberation. Deeply moved, Gonpo Dorji abandons hunting, becomes Milarepa's disciple, and eventually attains realization himself.

Moving among the crowd throughout the festival are the *atsaras* — figures whose name derives from Sanskrit *acharya*, meaning sacred teacher. Wearing large-nosed red masks, they mingle with the crowd as jesters, entertaining with pranks, providing irreverent commentary on the performances, and occasionally provoking unsuspecting bystanders into laughter.

Like the jesters of European royal courts of old, they use comedy to speak truths that more solemn figures cannot or dare not utter — though here the truth the *atsaras* point to is a specifically Buddhist one: the folly of attachment to things that appear in our transitory world of illusion. Nobody, foreigner or local, is safe from their mockery.

The climax of the festival comes before dawn on the final day. In darkness, thousands make their way to the dzong, their shadows outlined against the walls of the dimly lit streets — the silence punctuated only by indistinguishable murmurs and the occasional bark of a dog disturbed from its slumber.

Then, slowly and carefully, the *thongdrol* is unscrolled — a massive appliqué depicting Guru Rinpoche, so large it covers the entire front wall of the dzong. It must be rolled up again before the sun's rays touch it, as tradition holds that direct sunlight diminishes its sacred power. Seen only briefly in the grey half-light before daybreak, the vast image emerges from the darkness, the festival's long ritual cycle reaching its climax.

Tshechu is celebrated across all twenty districts of Bhutan, but Thimphu Tshechu, held at the seat of the reigning monarch and government and attended by thousands, remains the grandest — where ritual, spectacle, and devotion meet in an expression of Bhutanese Vajrayana Buddhism that remains fully alive and relevant.

As these dances and the *thongdrol* embody enlightened qualities, they do more than teach Dharma — they touch something deeper, leaving imprints in the mindstream of those who witness them, even without conscious understanding. These imprints are not merely memories stored in the brain that fade with the body, but active causal forces that continue to shape experience beyond a single lifetime.

Think of it like a snooker ball striking another: the first comes to rest, but the movement it set in motion continues in the second. In the same way, though the body falls away, the continuum of cause and effect remains unbroken, unfolding into further expressions of experience and life.

A traditional tale illustrates this with striking simplicity: a fly drawn to the smell of dung near a stupa unknowingly circled the sacred monument while following the scent. It had no awareness of the stupa and no intention of devotion, yet this accidental contact with a sacred object is said to have left such a powerful karmic imprint that, after a number of lifetimes, it ripened into favorable conditions for liberation.

A child, dragged along by her parents, bored and distracted, fidgets, tugging at her mother's sleeve. She barely notices the skeleton masks flashing past, the drumbeat shaking the courtyard, the smell of juniper smoke drifting in the autumn air. Yet those impressions lodge in her memory. Years later, when she faces loss or grief, the imprint may surface — the dancers' grinning skulls reminding her that impermanence is the truth, not a tragedy.

Around her, elders continue to turn their prayer beads, young men joke with friends, and families share food. Each carries away something different from the tshechu: laughter at the *atsaras'* antics, awe at the *thongdrol's* vast image, or simply the warmth of belonging to a crowd gathered in devotion. Few may be aware of it at the time, but they also depart with seeds of future realization quietly sown in their mindstreams.



An atsara mimics a mask dancer



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.

Book review



Before opening Bhutan Travelog, I expected another typical travel guide filled with attractions, maps and practical information. Instead, I found myself reading a book that made me want to experience Bhutan rather than simply visit it.

Of course, it contains everything you would expect from a comprehensive guidebook. There are sections on visas, suggested itineraries, festivals, accommodation, photography spots and practical travel tips. But what makes the book stand out is that it goes beyond logistics. Every chapter provides context about Bhutan's culture, traditions and way of life, helping readers understand not just where they are going, but why each place matters. Rather than overwhelming readers with facts, the information is presented in a way that feels accessible and enjoyable to read.

That depth of knowledge is hardly surprising. The book is co-authored by Ashley Chen and Joni Herison of Druk Asia, a Bhutan travel specialist agency. Together, they have collectively visited Bhutan more than 40 times and have spent close to two decades introducing the Kingdom to international travellers. Their extensive experience is evident throughout the book, from the practical advice and carefully planned itineraries to the lesser-known recommendations and cultural insights that can only come from years of exploring Bhutan firsthand.

The photography deserves special mention. Every page is filled with stunning images that showcase Bhutan in different seasons and from different perspectives. It's the kind of book you can easily leave on your coffee table, yet it's equally practical when you're planning a trip to Bhutan. I found myself pausing on many pages, not just to admire the photographs but to imagine what it would be like to stand in those places and experience them in person.

One feature I particularly enjoyed was the collection of interviews with travellers from different backgrounds. Rather than hearing from just the authors, readers get to learn from photographers, families, first-time visitors and repeat travellers who share their own experiences, favourite moments and travel tips. These interviews make the book feel more personal and relatable, reminding us that everyone experiences Bhutan differently. Some travellers are drawn by the mountains and monasteries, while others are captivated by the country's people, culture and slower pace of life. Reading these different perspectives makes the journey feel more authentic than a conventional guidebook.

Another pleasant surprise was how much attention the book gives to places beyond the obvious highlights. While iconic sites such as Paro Taktsang are, rightly, featured, there is also plenty of inspiration to venture further into Bhutan's valleys, villages, hiking trails and lesser-known corners. It encourages readers to slow down and appreciate the country rather than simply ticking attractions off a list. That philosophy of travelling more meaningfully seems to run through the entire book.

The latest edition has been updated with new destinations and refreshed travel information, making it an even more valuable resource than previous editions. If there's one guidebook to read before travelling to Bhutan, this is it. Comprehensive yet approachable, it covers everything from planning the journey to understanding the culture and making the most of every day in the Kingdom.

In a world where travel planning often means jumping between dozens of websites, blogs and social media posts, Bhutan Travelog brings everything together in one place. It feels thoughtfully curated, well organised and surprisingly comprehensive. If Bhutan is on your travel list, this is a book you'll definitely want to read before you start planning.

Reviewed by Rachel Chong

An avid traveller and cultural explorer who is especially drawn to Buddhist destinations across Asia. She enjoys visiting monasteries, attending local festivals and learning about the traditions and stories that shape each place.

Art review



Artwork Title: The Path and Paradise
Medium: Satshoen (Natural Pigment)
Artist: Yeshi Pelden
Exhibition Dates: 28 August – 27th September, 2026 | Open to All



Art Description

The work explores the idea of 'the path to paradise'. Different religions, cultures, and individuals imagine paradise in different ways, and each may have its own form, meaning, and destination. However, to reach the paradise we imagine or aspire to, we must choose and follow the 'right path'. The path represents our choices, actions, values, and way of life. Every step we take can bring us closer to, or further away from, our desired destination.

The artwork reflects the idea that paradise is not only a place we reach after life, but can also be something we create through our actions and choices in the present. There may be many different destinations, but the journey begins with choosing the right path.

Artist Profile

Born in 1991 in Bumthang, Artist Yeshi Pelden developed a passion for art while assisting his uncle, a painter, during one winter vacation. Inspired by this early experience, he joined the National Institute for Zorig Chusum (NIZC) in 2009 after completing Grade 10. At NIZC, he had the privilege of learning from esteemed teachers, including Lopen Tshewang Tenzin, and developed his practice in the traditional arts.

During his time at NIZC, he excelled academically, served as student leader, and was awarded the Best Outgoing Student medal in 2014. He currently serves as a Painting Instructor at NIZC, where he continues to engage with and contribute to the preservation and promotion of Bhutan's traditional arts and cultural heritage.

Step into the mesmerizing world of Bhutanese art at Yeshi Pelden's debut solo exhibition, titled, "ཁྱོན་བཟོད། - Perseverance" with VAST Bhutan, as part of VAST Bhutan's Lungta Art Festival 2026.



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

17171892
(Paro, Counter)

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IN THE PRESS

Drukair signs CrystalCare Programme with Pilatus for PC-24 Aircraft





Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, signed the CrystalCare Programme agreement with Pilatus for the PC-24 aircraft, marking another milestone in the airline's commitment to safety, reliability, and operational excellence.

The agreement provides comprehensive maintenance support and direct access to Pilatus global support network, ensuring efficient technical assistance and enhanced long-term performance of the aircraft. Through this partnership, Drukair strengthens the ability to maintain the highest standards of aircraft availability and operational efficiency while supporting the continued operation of the newest fleet addition.

Drukair launches souvenir collection at Paro International Airport





Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, has launched its souvenir collection at Paro International Airport. Featuring thoughtfully designed Drukair-branded merchandise, the collection offers passengers a lasting memory of their journey with Bhutan's national carrier.

Souvenirs are available near the departure counter, in the Business Class Lounge, and onboard selected flights. Passengers can also pre-order through Drukair's official website, making each item a meaningful keepsake or thoughtful gift.

Drukair partners with UNDP Bhutan for Global Conscious Food Systems Summit 2026





Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UNDP Bhutan to serve as the **Official Travel Partner** for the **Global Conscious Food Systems Summit 2026.**

The partnership reflects Drukair's continued commitment to supporting initiatives that advance sustainable development and foster international collaboration. As the official travel partner, Drukair will facilitate travel arrangements for summit delegates and provide dedicated support to ensure the successful delivery of the important global event.

The Global Conscious Food Systems Summit 2026 will bring together policymakers, development partners, researchers, and industry leaders to explore innovative approaches towards building more sustainable and resilient food systems. Drukair is honored to contribute to this meaningful initiative by connecting participants to Bhutan and supporting a platform for global dialogue and collaboration.

Drukair supports 15th Bhutan Echoes: Drukyul's Literature & Arts Festival as official Travel Partner



Drukair, Royal Bhutan Airlines, proudly served as the official Travel Partner for the 15th edition of Bhutan Echoes: Drukyul's Literature & Arts Festival.

Held under the theme "The Art of Being Human", the festival brought together renowned authors, artists, and inspiring voices from Bhutan and around the world for a vibrant exchange of ideas, creativity, and meaningful dialogue. The event celebrated literature, arts, and culture while fostering connections across diverse perspectives and experiences.

The partnership reflected Drukair's continued commitment to promoting initiatives that showcase Bhutan's rich cultural heritage and strengthen its engagement with the global community.

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DRUKAIR OFFICES

THAILAND

BANGKOK - AIRPORT OFFICE

Drukair Corporation Ltd.
23-010, 3rd Floor, 999 Moo 1, Airlines office (AOB)
Suvarnabhumi International Airport
Bangkok, Thailand.
Tel: +66 21349040
Email: bkkrs@drukair.com.bt

GSA - Passenger & Cargo

Oriole Travels & Tours Co Limited.
5th Floor Suite No 1414, Skulthai Surawong Tower,
Surawong Road, Bangkok 10500, Thailand
Tel: +662 237 92013
Email: bangkok@drukair.com.bt /
bangkokcargo@drukair.com.bt

NEPAL

KATHMANDU - AIRPORT OFFICE

Drukair Corporation Ltd.
Room No. 009, Tribhuvan International Airport,
Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: +977 1411311 2
Email: ktmrk@drukair.com.bt

GSA - Cargo

Starlight Express Private Limited
Starlight Building, Sahayogi Nagar, Janata Sadak,
KTM02, 44600 G.P.O Box 12715, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: +977-1-4155451
Email: kathmanducargo@drukair.com.bt

CSA

Zenith Nepal Cargo Service pvt. Ltd.
P.O Box: 7237, Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: +977 9841579170; +977 985 1022105
Email: zenithel2054@gmail.com
Website: www.zenithcargo.com

GSA - Passenger

Danfe Travel Centre
P.O Box: 4429, Kamalpokhari, Behind Marcopolo
Business Hotel Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: +977 01 4528667
Email: kathmandu@drukair.com.bt

CSA

M/s Sunrise International Privace Limited
Pulchowk Na Iple 19 lalitpur
Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: +977-9849356838/ 9752514779/ 17551618
Email: internationalsunrise2022@gmail.com

SINGAPORE

GSA - Passenger

Druk Asia Pte Ltd.
60, Albert Street, #12-03, OG Albert Complex,
Singapore - 189969.
Tel: +65 8767 9939
Email: singapore@drukair.com.bt

CSA

Druk Logistics Pte Ltd.
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OG Albert Complex, Singapore - 189969.
Tel: +65 96238168
Email: info@drukcargo.com

GSA - Cargo & PSA

Chariot Travels Pte Ltd.
101 Kitchener Road 03-38, Jalan Besar Plaza,
Singapore - 208511.
Tel: +65 84941625, 6388-833 / +65-9061 9070 /
90042656
Email: drukair@chariot.com.sg / singaporecargo@
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JAPAN

TOKYO (GSA - Passenger)

White Bear Family Co. Ltd.
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CHINA

SHANGHAI (GSA - Passenger)

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KUNMING (CSA)

KUZU Co., Ltd.
Kunming 650000, People's East Road, Yi Lao Mall,
2205/3
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Email: haoyagong@myish.com
Website: www.myish.co

HONGKONG

HONG KONG (GSA - Passenger)

Megatop 3. A. Ltd.
9F Chung Nam building,
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U.S.A

Florida (GSA - Passenger)

AirlinePros International Inc
9F Chung Nam building,
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Miami, Florida 33126, USA
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Email: florida@drukair.com.bt

ISRAEL

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DRUKAIR OFFICES

INDIA (GSA - Passenger)

AHMEDABAD

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ahmedabadcargo@drukair.com.bt

BENGALURU

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mumbaicargo@drukair.com.bt

COCHIN

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dath Road , Ravipuram, Kochi, 682015
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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
Bagh, Hyderabad-4.
Phone: +0140-23240755
Email: hydrabad@drukair.com.bt /
hydrabadcargo@drukair.com.bt

CHENNAI

Global Aviation Services Pvt. Ltd.
CITI TOWER , 4TH FLOOR,No. 117 , Sir Thyagaraya
Road , T.Nagar , Chennai - 600017
Phone: +91 98840 68072
Email: chennai@drukair.com.bt /
chennaicargo@drukair.com.bt

PUNE

Global Aviation Services Pvt. Ltd.
3, Hermes Kunj, 48, Mangalcas Road,Pune - 411001
Phone: 020- 41052204
Email: pune@drukair.com.bt

KUWAIT

KUWAIT CITY (GSA - Passenger)

Caesars Int'l Travel Co. W.L.L.
18th Floor, Alawhaea Tower,
Al Al-Salem Street, Safat-13056,
PB-28225
Tel: +965 22072040
Email: kuwait@drukair.com.bt

KUWAIT CITY (PSA)

Alrashed International Travel Co. W.L.L
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Fahad Al Salem St., Salhiya P.O. Box: 242;
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Website: www.alrashed.travel

UNITED KINGDOM

LONDON (GSA - Passenger)

Flight Directors Scheduled Services Limited
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Tel: +44 1293 874012
Email: london@dn.kair.com.bt

SOUTH KOREA

SEOUL (GSA - Passenger)

Pacific Air International
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Jung-gu, Seoul, 04527, Republic of Korea.
Tel: +82 2 317 8830
Email: seoul@drukair.com.bt

SEOUL (CSA)

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Email: downtown@paisgrp.co.kr

GERMANY

FRANKFURT (GSA - Passenger)

TAL Aviation Germany UG
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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, 399 Sir Razik Fareed Mawatha,
Colombo-1, Sri Lanka.
Tel: +94 11 4731564
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
69 Boulevard Haussmann, 75008, Paris, France
Tel: +33 1 75 56 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 invitee 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 "doma" (areca nut and betel leaf) in the aircraft are strictly prohibited.

SPECIAL LOUNGES

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

TRAVEL TIPS

Transit time should not exreed 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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MONDAY & FRIDAY	KB211	KOLKATA-GELEPHU	1350	1520
		GELEPHU-PARO	1550	1630

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Drukair
Royal Bhutan Airlines

Key Information



Trekking in Bhutan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other Treks in Bhutan

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

Average Temperature

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

Driving Time Between Various Places in Bhutan

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

Festival Dates for 2026

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

National Holidays 2026

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

Negative list on movement of tourist within Bhutan

Prohibited Areas

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

Restricted Areas

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

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



Basic Dzongkha

INTRODUCTIONS

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



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

TRAVEL TALK

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



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

SHOPPING CONVERSATION

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

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

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



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





TELEPHONE TETE-A TETE

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

It was tasty

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



No more, thanks

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



Thank you
Kardrinchhey

EMERGENCY ESSENTIALS

I'm ill : *Nga nau may*

Where is the hospital?
Menkhang ga tey in na?

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



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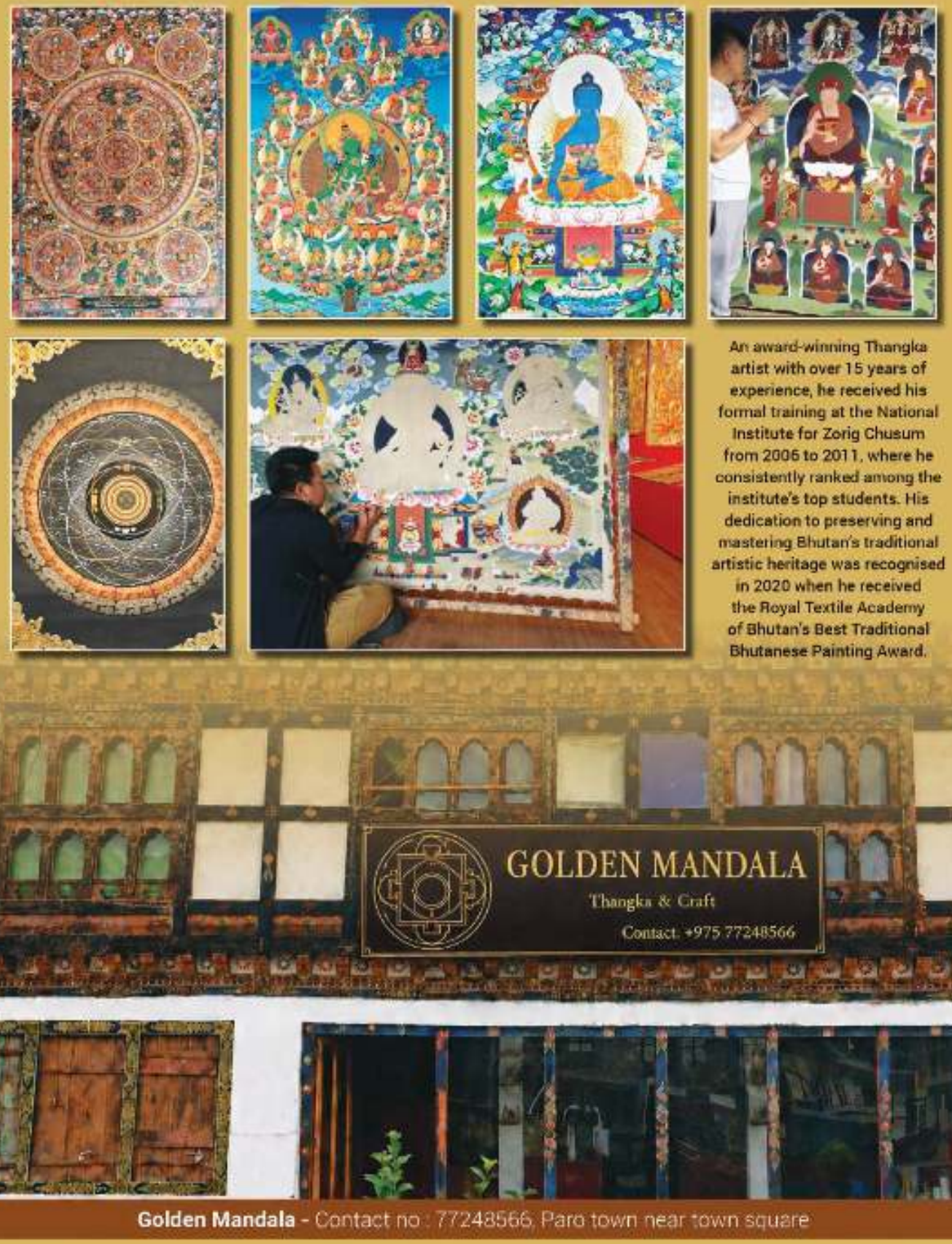


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GOLDEN MANDALA



An award-winning Thangka artist with over 15 years of experience, he received his formal training at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum from 2006 to 2011, where he consistently ranked among the institute's top students. His dedication to preserving and mastering Bhutan's traditional artistic heritage was recognised in 2020 when he received the Royal Textile Academy of Bhutan's Best Traditional Bhutanese Painting Award.

Golden Mandala - Contact no : 77248566, Paro town near town square

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