

DISCOVER, EXPLORE & EXPERIENCE THE WORLD

lonely planet

MAGAZINE
ASIA

MARCH/APRIL 2013

PLUS!

- Arts Revival in **KYOTO**
- **CLASSIC PROVENCE**
The Perfect Trip through
South of France
- Escape to **THE INDIAN
OCEAN**: 10 luxurious beach
getaways to plan for
- **DUBLIN SPEAKS**
Walk with Ireland's
greatest writers

5 New Eurostar Breaks

French wine weekends,
German spa breaks
and more

WIN!
3Days/2Nights
Stay at Regent
SINGAPORE

6 MINI GUIDES TO KEEP

● Sydney ● Amsterdam ● Sicily ● North Cornwall ● Munich ● Istanbul



SGD 7.50
RM 15
NT 270
RP 75,000
THB 195
9 772010 082017

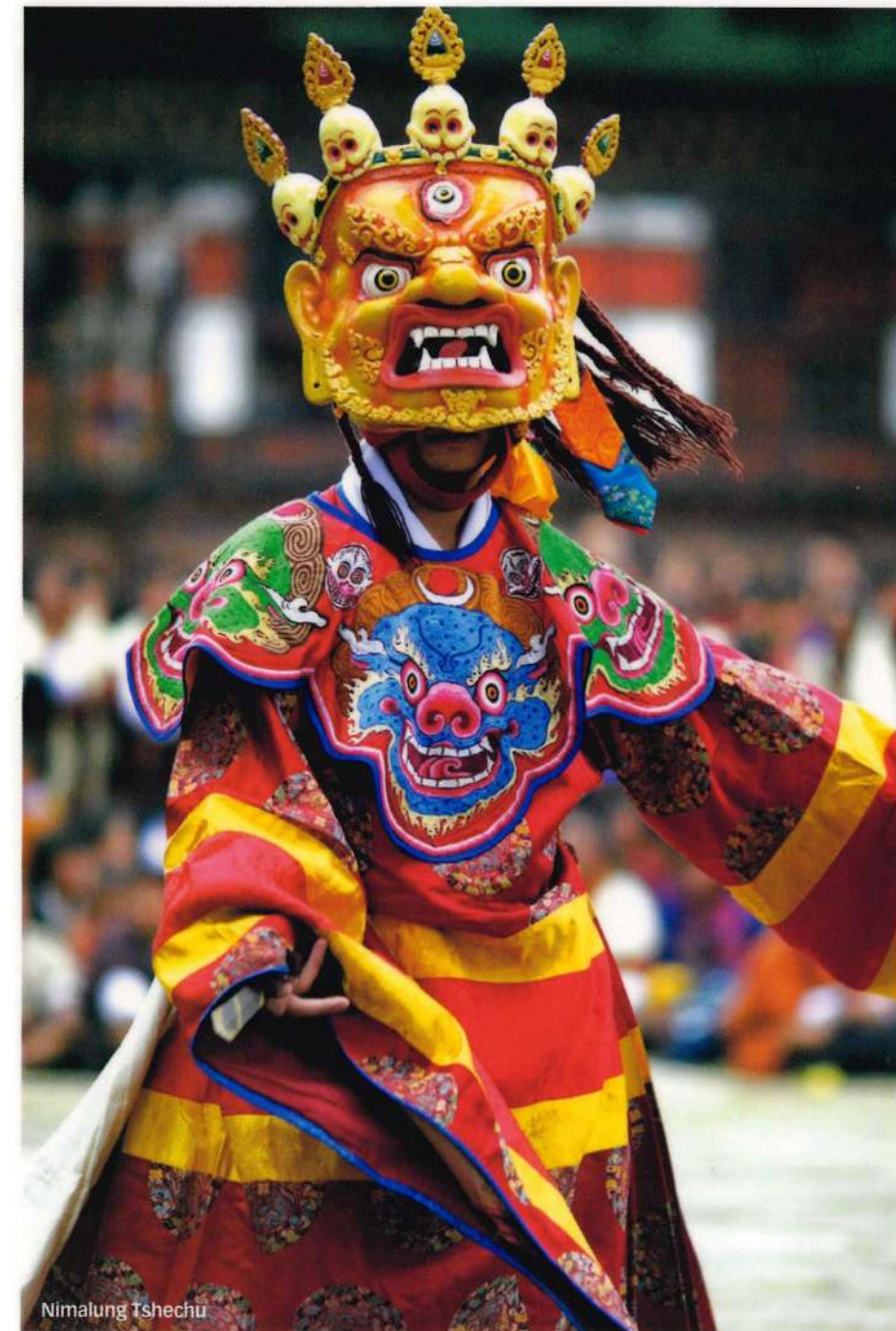


MCI (P) 004/04/2013, PPS 1747/12/2012(022909)

Regent
SINGAPORE

ROMANCING THE LAND OF THE THUNDER DRAGON

Happy and Holistic, the mountainous kingdom of Bhutan is precious untouched by mass tourism, where unspoilt forests, gorgeous monasteries, Mahayana Buddhist historical relics and smiling monks will take your breath (and heart) away



Nimalung Tshochu

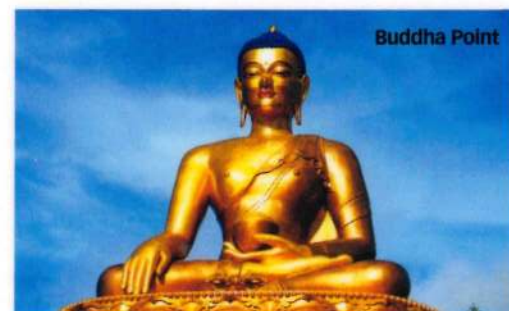
If a price tag could be placed on peace and happiness, then perhaps a trip to the tiny Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan would cut it closest. One might lament the non-existence of popular chain giants Starbucks and McDonald's, of ancient sights accessible only via long-distances on foot, or even the lack of international hotelier names vying for land in this Himalayan nation. Yet, Bhutan stands as one of the happiest places on earth, a spiritual haven reflected in the smiles of its people, in its serene monasteries and mystical fortresses, within generations of culture that has retained its soul even as the world charges relentlessly towards progress.

Independent travel is not permitted in Bhutan; the only way is via a tour operator who will arrange your accommodation, transport with driver and guide, meals and visa with a flat fee (US\$200 low season, US\$250 peak season). In Singapore, Druk Asia Private Limited (drukasia.com) offers a variety of itineraries, here are just some of the highlights in enjoying the best that Bhutan has to offer.

Day 1 & 2: Paro - Thimphu - Punakha

• Tashichho Dzong

This is the site of the government's Gross National Happiness office, and where the changing of guard ceremony takes place daily at five in the morning and evening. A temple also houses the central monk body, where fifth King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck received his coronation and held his marriage ceremony in 2011 as well.



Buddha Point



Dochula Pass

• Buddha Point

Providing an impressive 360 degree vista of the Thimphu valley, Buddha Point is about a 15 minute drive up from town. With building works expected to be completed by mid to late 2013, the gleaming 169-foot bronze statue of Buddha Dordenma (Vajra Throne Buddha) is Bhutan's largest statue, reverently overlooking its people and a perfect place for photo-taking opportunities.

• Dochula Pass

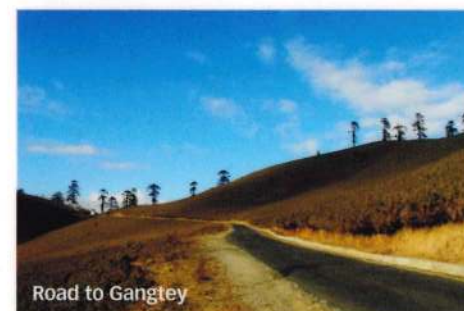
Leaving capital Thimphu towards Punakha, the Dochula (which means pass) requires a steep drive up 3,050 metres, but rewards you with beautiful panoramic views of the snow-capped Himalaya mountains on clear days. Take a walk amongst the 108 chortens, built in honour of fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Proceed for lunch at the sole restaurant there, tucking into local dish ema datshi - a delicious mix of chilli and cheese.

• Punakha Dzong

Punakha Dzong sits like a painting amidst the rushing Mo and Pho (Mother and Father River), an important religious site built in 1637. Guides will explain the amazing legends and real history surrounding the dzong, as you walk amongst its three majestic courtyards. The first houses the government offices, while the third innermost one - also the most breathtaking - was the main temple where fifth King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck's wedding was held.

Day 3 to 5: Punakha - Trongsa - Bumthang

• Trongsa Museum

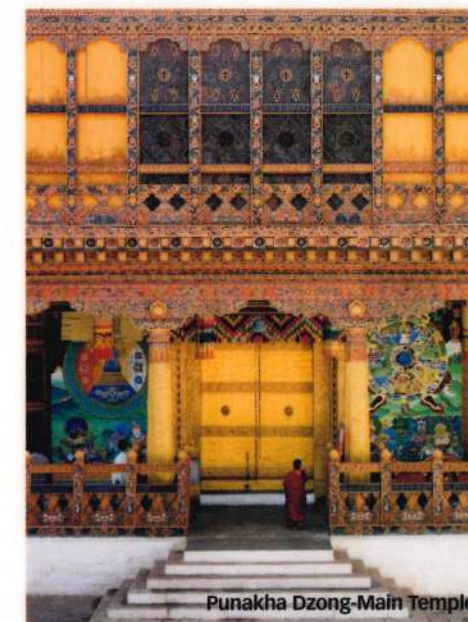


Road to Gangtey

Sitting high over Trongsa Dzong, the 'Tower of Trongsa' tells the tales of the dzong and the valley it has watched for centuries. Dedicated to the Wangchuk dynasty, the Taa Dzong (translates into 'to watch' in Dzongkha) now stands as a museum exuding a tasteful blend of tradition and modernity, the 224 items displayed including a sacred image of Sung Joenma Dorji Chang (self-spoken Vajradharma), historical dance and ritual costumes and objects, ancient prayer books, paintings and scrolls and textiles.

• Nimalung Tshochu

Literally translated from Dzongkha, 'tshochu' means 'an annual religious Bhutanese festival', these events lasting up to four days, typically held on auspicious dates in the local calendar. Colourful and loud, the festivals honour Guru Rinpoche, the saint who introduced tantric Buddhism to the Kingdom in the eighth century. 16 June marks the first day of Nimalung Tshochu, where you can expect monks adorning expressive masks and colourful costumes, dancing and amusing the public. Spiritually, locals believe the masked



Punakha Dzong-Main Temple

dances invoke deities to blessings, removing misfortunes, fulfilling wishes and removing sins. Such days are also fantastic ways for social gatherings, locals donning their finest traditional garbs and jewellery.

Day 6: Bumthang - Gangtey

• Black-Necked Crane Information Centre

The valley of Phobjikha serves as the winter home for the black necked cranes when the birds migrate from the Tibetan plateau, typically from early November to end March. The Centre is equipped with powerful

telescopes to spot the elegant birds, accompanied by a pamphlet on 'Field Guide to Crane Behaviour' for easy reference.

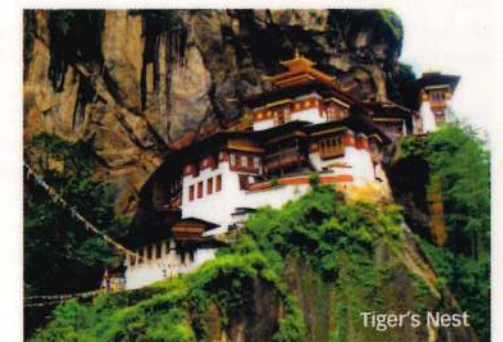
Day 8 & 9: Paro

• Chele La Pass

Kickstart the morning early with a drive to Haa through Chele La, the highest passable roads in Bhutan at 3,988 metres. On a clear day, the view extends out to the Paro valley and Haa valley on either sides, and also to the snow-peaked dome of Bhutan's second highest peak, Mt Jhomolhari. Next, descend on a two-hour hike down dense forestry - possibly seeing yaks along the way - towards Kila Goemba, one of Bhutan's seven oldest nunneries, this retreat a serene home to nuns leading a peaceful life of meditation and prayer. Another hour down takes you back to the main roads where you hop on a mountain bike towards Paro Valley. For something easier, options are available for a sightseeing drive from Chele La Pass towards Haa Valley.

• Taktsang Lhakhang (Tiger's Nest)

Perching precariously 10,000 feet above sea level in Paro, legend has it that around the eighth century, the reverend Guru Rinpoche flew across the mountains on the back of a tigress, making the Taktsang Lhakhang home. A must-visit attraction in Bhutan and plastered across postcards countrywide, the monastery was built in 1692, but suffered the ruins of a fire in early 1998. Now renovated and restored to its former glory, the Tiger's Nest is a hiker's delight, where the achievement of surmounting the peak - a stunning position right beneath the clouds - stands as a personal feat for many.



Tiger's Nest

Getting There

Direct flights are available from Singapore Changi Airport to Paro Airport via Drukair (drukair.com.sg), with a refuel stop at Kolkata, India. From Kuala Lumpur, fly to Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport before connecting to Paro with Drukair, the national carrier airline of Bhutan.

For more itineraries and information, go to www.drukasia.com, or call +65 6338 9909