

amankora

365 Days of Happiness



Finding Bliss in Every Day

Bhutan is a global pioneer, the first nation of the world to systematically measure its success not by the strength of its economy but by the happiness of its people. Such a unique approach befits a country unlike any other – a wild, spiritual and majestic mountain kingdom where tranquility reigns and everything is off the beaten track. Whether travelers visit in the height of spring and summer, when the Himalayas are carpeted with wildflowers, in the vibrantly changing colours of autumn or in the depths of winter, when cobalt skies segue into spectacular starscapes – Bhutan is a year-round revelation.

With the same latitude as Miami, Florida, the Kingdom of Bhutan exists in a tropical plane, but because of its unique topography and varying altitudes, it enjoys four seasons in most high valleys, is on a constant state of winter in elevations above 4,500 meters and is warm year-round in lower altitudes. Discover the kingdom in 4 seasons of wonders and explorations, 5 valleys with varying altitudes and attitudes, 12 months of bliss, 365 days of happiness. The best time to visit is anytime. Come.



January



January 2023

As the coldest month of the year, January brings in some snowfall in most valleys, but be quick – take a photo of that otherworldly scene of the Tiger’s Nest or the big Buddha Dordenma with a dusting of snow as the bright Himalayan sun melts most of the ice by midday. The rest of the time, the valleys remain pleasant for a cultural discovery or a nature hike. For avid stargazers and night photography enthusiasts, January brings the clearest skies to the Himalayan landscapes. The days too are just as perfect to capture on frame, with crystal clear cloudless skies and a brand of captivating blue that will bring out the Yves Klein in anyone.

International New Year – January 1

New Year in Bhutan is a low-key celebration, but what could be more spectacular and enlightening than seeing the first light of the year amid the roof of the world, where the highest unclimbed mountains in the planet greet you with wishes and blessings of infinite possibilities.

Winter Solstice (Nyilo) – January 2

A celebration marked by offerings and songs, the Nyilo is a religious holiday marked by temple visits and songs. Amankora Thimphu will host a children’s choir to celebrate Nyilo with traditional songs.

Traditional Day of Offering – January 14

A local celebration traditionally directed towards the unifier of the Kingdom of Bhutan in the 17th century, this day is marked by the Bhutanese adorning their best gho and kira attires, picnics, household feasts and offerings to temples.

Lunar New Year – January 21 to 27

Amankora’s five lodges ring in the new zodiac year of the Water Rabbit with evenings of celebrations featuring an Asian feast, astrology readings and cultural performances.



Winter Highlight: Yaks and the Layaps

Nomadic dwellers from the kingdom's far north, the Layap minorities migrate to the lower valleys during the winter months (December-February) and around Punakha, they bring with them their fascinating culture through their herds of yak, unique weaving cultures, iconic hats and handicrafts.



February



February 2023

February rings in romantic interludes and Bhutan has plenty of offerings in the way of love – from hikes to aptly named temples like Cheri and Tango Monasteries, and sweeping stays in Amankora Gangtey – home to the fiercely love-loyal black necked cranes, candlelit dinners at the traditional potato sheds and relaxing traditional hot stone baths for couples. In Punakha's Chimi Lhakhang, locals visit the temple to incur blessings to conceive a child, and in Bumthang, a three-time "kora" wearing an ancient iron chain jacket around Tamshing Lhakhang is believed to bring in good karma and eternal love.

Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the King – February 21 to 23

Celebrating the 40th birth anniversary of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck ignites the fire of thanksgiving in every Bhutanese for their beloved king. Marked by three full days of festivities around the country, the valleys come alive with public programmes of dances, fairs, feasts and songs.

Pelden Lhamoi Drubchen / Festival of Mahakali – February 25 to 27

This unique festival in Trongsa is held in Trongsa Dzong, where the dominant or main female protective deity of Bhutan known as the goddess Mahakali is celebrated in this colourful 3-day festivities of dances and songs on the spectacular fortress grounds. The festival is a scenic drive away from Amankora Bumthang but can also be organised when one is enroute from Amankora Gangtey lodge to the lodge in Bumthang where a long pitstop for the festival can be enjoyed.

Punakha Drubchen – February 26 to 28

Days before the festival, the Punakha Drubchen is held to showcase the history and mythical narratives of the construction of the Punakha Dzong to the public. Sacred masked dances and folk dances are performed by the central monastic body and citizens of the district.



March



March 2023

The month of March sees the awakening of the valleys as spring stirs them from their winter slumber. As the dry earth and barren trees see its first buds and initial blasts of green, so too does the festival season start to unfold in the kingdom's most important valleys where colourful performances and ceremonies showcase the rich tapestries of Bhutanese culture.

Punakha Tsechu – March 1 to 3

The main festival of Punakha Valley showcases more performances and bright parades of locals in their most colourful ghos and kiras but the highlight of the festivities is the unfurling of the thongdrol, a large tapestry of Guru Rinpoche – Bhutan's most revered religious icon.

Bhutan International Marathon and Half Marathon – March 4

Organised by the Bhutan Olympic Committee, this full and half marathons in Punakha also coincide with the last day of the valley's religious festival. The full marathon starts in Gasa, one of Bhutan's highest districts then goes down towards the subtropical valley of Punakha, ending in its historic dzong.

Gasa Tsechu – March 29 to 31

A festival set in one of Bhutan's most stunning districts, the celebration is held in a community boasting the country's highest elevation. The culture of the highlander communities and their distinct dances and songs make this a truly unique spectacle to witness.

Tharpaling Thongdrol (Unfurling of the Holy Scroll) Chumi, Bumthang – March 7
Similar to the unfurling of the giant scroll in Punakha's tsechu, with the exception of the dances and grand festivities. Instead, this sacred applique silk scroll with elaborate Buddhist imagery features Jowo Jampa and Kuenkhen Longchen Rabjam is presented once a year to the public and this unfurling is meant to bring good karma with the scroll's presence. This sacred ceremony is marked by 10 days of prayers and Buddhist ceremonies by the monks of Tharpaling Lhakhang to the people of Chumi Valley.

Talo Tsechu, Talo Goempa, Punakha – March 29 to 31

A three-day festival of masked and atsara dances, the festivity gathers the villages around Talo Monastery in Punakha. Unlike the Punakha, Thimphu and Paro tsechus that draw in large crowds and visitors, this intimate festival is as authentic as it is fully undiscovered.



April



April 2023

Spring takes on its most elaborate and colourful forms in April and all over Bhutan, the mountains and valleys showcase flamboyance with entire forests and fields of wildflowers in every shape and shade. Festivals too, begin to turn sleepy valleys into vivid displays of dances, ceremonies and rituals.

Paro Tsechu – April 2 to 6

If you ask any Bhutanese, no festival marks their calendars on deep red more than the Paro Tsechu. The Rinpung Dzong comes alive with dances and songs, but the main highlight are the locals donning their most colourful and expensive kiras and ghos, earning the festival the moniker “Bhutan Fashion Week.”

Rhododendron Festival, Dochula, Thimphu – April 14 to 16

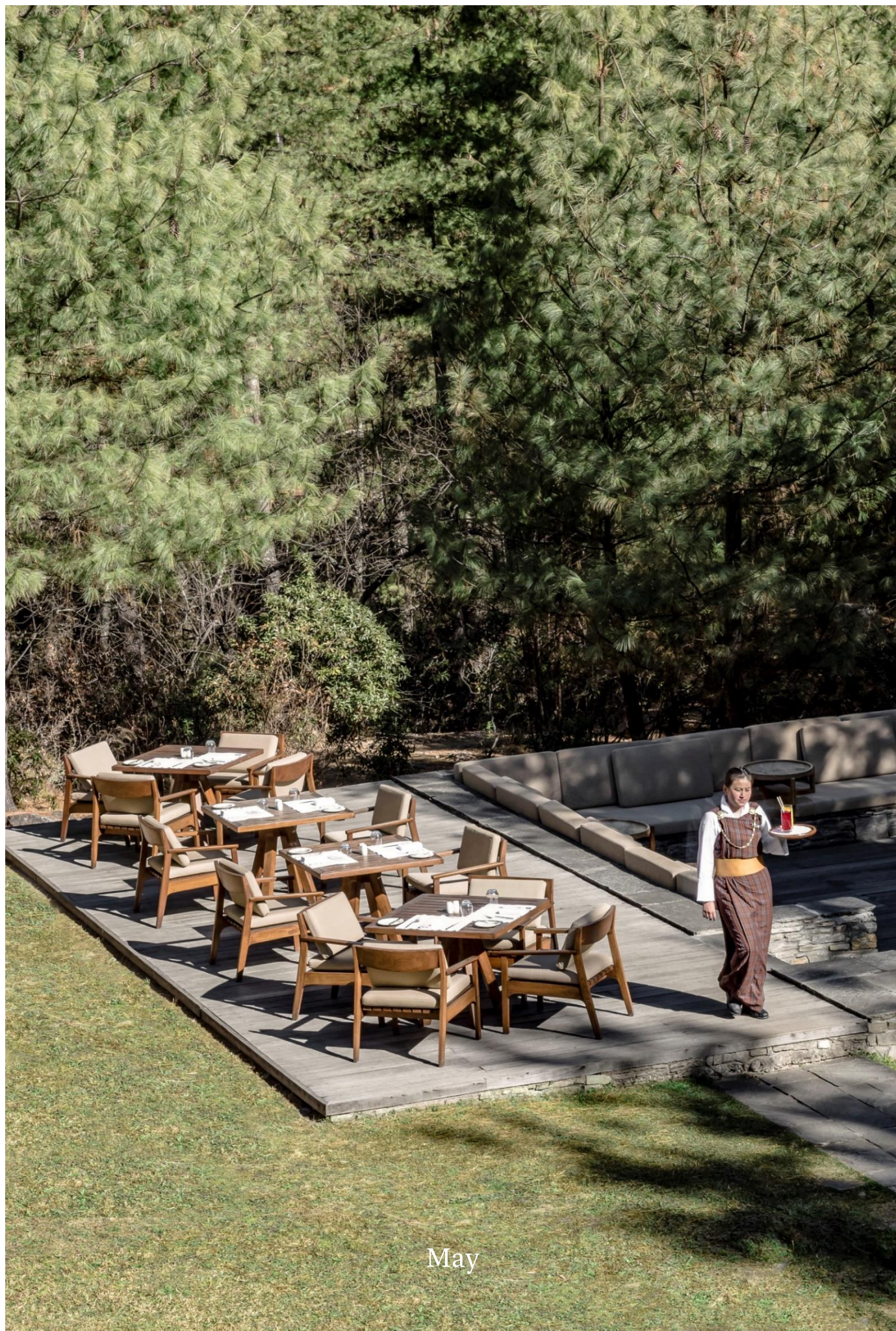
With over 46 species of Rhododendron flowers that thrive in Bhutan, this festival marks the vivid natural display of these flowering trees. All over Bhutan, many mountains and forest trails are carpeted with these beautiful flowers with colours ranging from white, pink, red to purple.

Zhabdrung Kuchoe – April 22

Commemorating the death anniversary of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the Tibetan Buddhist lama and leader who first united Bhutan as a nation state in 1630, this day is marked by the unfurling of the Thongdrol of Zhabdrung in Punakha Dzong. Everywhere else in Bhutan, temples are hold sacred ceremonies and locals light up butter lamps.

Domkhar Tsechu, Chumey, Bumthang – April 30 to May 2

A three-day festival celebrated since the 1700s as initiated by Serkhong Truelkhu in western Bumthang’s Domkhar Village, this colourful and historical festivities are marked by sacred chams and masked dances deriving its origins from Terton Pema Lingpa. On the last day of the feast, large scrolls are unfurled to bring blessings to the citizens of the village and the visiting revelers.



May



May 2023

The peak of spring reaches its zenith in May and as warmer winds turn the cold into cool, the valleys reach a level of lushness that would captivate every outdoor type of visitor. It is at this time when nature hikes are in their most stunning and everywhere you wander seems to put you perfectly on a frame of a postcard.

Domkhar Tsechu, Chumey, Bumthang – May 1 to 2

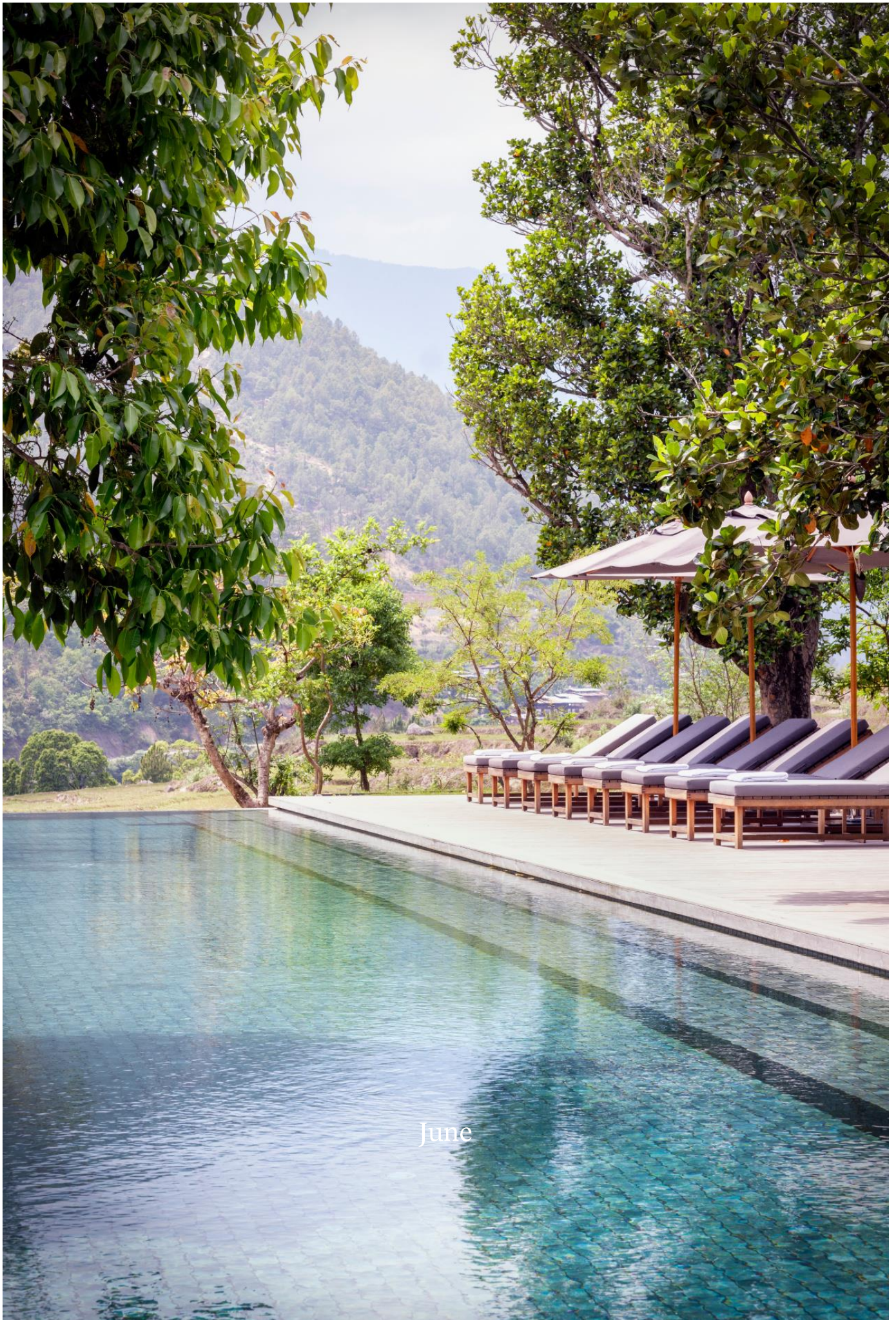
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Birth Anniversary of the 3rd Druk Gyalpo, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck – May 2

A holiday to honour the birthday, the memory and accomplishments of Bhutan's third king. His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck was largely responsible for opening Bhutan to the outside world for paving way for its first wave of modernisation.

Ura Yakchoe, Ura Valley, Bumthang – May 2 to 6

Another small but unique festival in a picturesque village in Bhutan's eastern valleys, this celebration held in Ura Lhakhang is highlighted by invoking and escorting of Yidam Chana Dorjee (a holy Buddhist deity) from Gaythen to Ura.



June



June 2023

If the month of June was literature, it would probably be Shakespeare's sonnets. This transition month between spring and summer brings forth a rhythmic turning of pages when flowers suddenly turn to fruits and the first harvests of the season gives every kitchen and dining table songs to warble about.

Lord Buddha's Parinirvana – June 4

A sacred holiday honouring Buddha's nirvana or gaining of enlightenment. Many Bhutanese will go on pilgrimage to holy sites and temples are set with ceremonies to bless pilgrims. Some of the county's holiest relics and statuary are also put on display.

Birth Anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen– June 4

Beautiful as she is stylish, Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck is both a regal and a fashion icon in the country. Her Majesty's birthday is celebrated and honoured all around Bhutan and the fabrics she wears on her kira and tego on her yearly portraits are prized and sought after by everyone in the kingdom.

Nimalung Tsechu, Bumthang – June 26 to 28

A three-day festivity of Cham and masked dances performed by monks of Nimalung Dratshang highlighted by the unfurling of the sacred Guru Tshengye Thongdrol scroll on the last day.

Birth Anniversary of Guru Rinpoche – June 20

Apart from the tsechu in Kurjey Temple in Bumthang, the whole kingdom joins in the celebration across the valleys to honour their most revered religious figure with temple ceremonies and offerings.

Having been credited for the founding of the Tiger's Nest and many other important religious edifices in Bhutan, a pilgrimage to these Buddhist monuments are an important task to accomplish for many Bhutanese.

Kurjey Tsechu, Bumthang – June 28

Celebrated in one of Bumthang Valley's most sacred temple, this one-day celebration pays tribute to Guru Rinpoche, credited for bringing Buddhism to Bhutan. Here, tantric dancing and ceremonies are performed the whole day, capped by the display of the large sacred scroll.



July



July 2023

While monsoon blesses the grounds of neighbouring India and Bangladesh vastly, here in Bhutan the rains come in short, poetic breaths – watering the mountains and the valleys with symbolic sprinkles of water and the rest of the day sees the sunshine radiantly lighting up the lush landscapes while dramatic mists lurk nearby as dramatic veils to the setting.

Haa Summer Festival – July 8 to 9

A day trip away from Paro is the scenic valley of Haa in Bhutan's western edges. This two-day summer festival is a lively celebration of the valley's cuisine, nomadic culture and western Bhutanese traditional lifestyles through fairs, floral displays, songs, dancing, food showcases, traditional sports, performances and open houses in villages. One of the country's least visited areas, Haa maintains a sense of authentic Bhutanese way of life and a day here rewards visitors with gems awaiting discovery.

First Sermon of Lord Buddha – July 21

As a deeply devout Buddhist nation, Bhutan celebrates the First Sermon of Lord Buddha as a national holiday. Thousands of Bhutanese flock the temples and religious sites on this day, embarking on sacred pilgrimages and making offerings to mark the first time that Buddha codified the "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhism and the day he began teaching these doctrines. Temples are beautifully adorned to welcome the faithful and to celebrate the triumph of Buddhism through Buddha's teachings.



August



August 2023

After a month of light rains sprinkling the grounds, the valleys and mountain in August erupt in fifty shades of green, fully revealing the undisputed title of Bhutan as the world's last Shangri-la. Waterfalls cascade aplenty on mountainsides amid lush carpets of foliage, birds and wildlife adorn the storybook landscapes and in Punakha, the Mo Chhu and Po Chhu Rivers both roar with spectacular rapids and river current from the melting glacial ice – creating the perfect rides for rafting, a signature adventure for the valley.

Mushroom Festival, Thimphu – August 15 to 16

Genekha, a secluded village in Thimphu Valley known for its mushrooms plays host to this unique festival. Mushroom foraging excursions are organised together with cultural performances and mushroom cooking classes.

Mountain Echoes Literary Festival, Thimphu – August (TBC)

Now on its 14th year, the literary festival draws the best writers, poets, authors and literary figures in the region and around the world. Interesting writing workshops, forums, book and poetry readings, talks and exhibitions are held all over the capital for three days, free for the public.

Matsutake Festival, Bumthang – Last week of August (TBC)

Highly-prized in Western cuisine, the best Matsutake mushrooms grow aplenty in Bhutan and this tasty fungus is a big part of local cuisine. In Bumthang's Ura Valley, a festival is held when the Matsutake mushroom is on the peak of harvests, where mushroom picking excursions are held with mushroom identification workshops, dancing, songs and of course a feast of food featuring the celebrated fungi.



Summer Highlight: Culinary Journeys and Harvests

Blessed with fertile valleys and a wealth of crops as diverse as the county's topography, summer brings the best harvests and journeys of the culinary nature make summer the best season for foodies. Matsutake mushrooms, fiddlehead ferns, chilies and flowers abound from farm to table.



Summer Highlight: Summer High Altitude Training

The Summer High Altitude Training is an intense 10-day training journey through intense daily hikes, bikes, and spa treatments designed around the setting of Amankora's five lodges. At varying altitudes, this breathtaking training is a path of endurance and wellness for the mind, body and soul.



September

September 2023

The cool breeze of September officially signals the arrival of autumn and the kingdom's festival season kicks off with colour and flair. Around the kingdom, the valleys explode with celebrations and traditional ceremonies from the smallest village temple to the largest dzongs.

Tour of the Dragon Cycling Race – September 2

An incredible journey of Bhutan on two wheels with the world's toughest cycling race. Amankora offers a package for participants including stays, training and logistics.

Thimphu Drubchen – September 21

An important consecration day and ceremonies leading to the capital's biggest festival.

Wangdue Tsechu – September 22 to 24

Widely known for the Raksha Mangcham or the Dance of the Ox, this three-day festival in the kingdom's "Valley of the Wind" is a distinct display of culture in Central Bhutan.

Blessed Rainy Day (Thue Bup) – Sept 23

A holiday marking the end of the rains in the Himalayas, a rain or any water from sacred lakes and rivers collected on this day is collected and used as a bath to cleanse and sanctify one of bad karma.

Thimphu Tsechu – September 24 to 26

The capital's biggest festival is marked by elaborate dances, songs and ceremonies in the setting of Tashichho Dzong, the royal and national seat of administration in Bhutan. Members of Bhutan's highest royal and monastic orders as well as government officials and international dignitaries attend the festival.

Tamsing Phala Choepa, Bumthang – September 24 to 26

People from all over Bhutan gather in Bumthang for this three-day festivity to witness the dances of tertön (treasure discoverer) Perma Lingpa performed by the monks and people of Tamsing and the monastery. One of the highlights include the Phagchham or the Pig Dance and the Pholay Molay Cham.

Gangtey Tsechu – September 27 to 29

Held in the courtyard of the valley's historic monastery of Gangtey Goempa, this tsechu showcases sacred masked dances, cultural performances and tantric ceremonies. The costumes and revelry accentuated in this festival is a true delight for any photographer and reveler.

Thangbi Mani – September 24 to 30

One of the most popular festivals in Bumthang, Thangbi Mani is celebrated in the 15th century Thangbi Monastery. The festival's biggest crowd drawers are the fire dances and the purification rituals using fire. Although organised only by a small community, the festival is well loved for its unique custom where guests are encouraged to jump over the fire three times to usher in good karma and luck. Festival guests are also offered buckwheat noodles and beverages by the villagers.



October



October 2023

As autumn swings in full force, Bhutan's colours transforms itself into bright swaths of orange, yellows and crimsons and the festivals unfolding around the valleys seem to echo the bright outlook of nature's show.

Ugyencholing Kangsoel, Tang Valley, Bumthang – October 13 to 15

One of the oldest royal palaces in Bhutan now converted into a private museum, this intimate gathering celebrates the holy consecration of the temple and the founding of the palace.

Jhomolhari Mountain Festival – October 14 to 15

One of Bhutan's most remote festival sites, the Jhomolhari Base Camp where the festival unfolds is a two-night trek for a one-way journey (approximately 6-8 hours of hiking per day), and another two-night journey on the way back.

Jakar Tsechu – October 22 to 24

As Bumthang's main administrative valley, Jakar is an important center in the east and its 3-day festival held on the historic Jakar Dzong is a colourful mélange of dances, songs and traditional performances both from the monastic body of the district and the villages nearby.

Dechenphug Tsechu, Thimphu – October 24

A private royal temple closed to foreigners, Dechenpug opens its doors wide open to everybody once a year only on this bright and colourful festival.

Dashain (Southern Bhutanese holiday) – October 24

A holiday originating from India, Nepal and Southern Bhutan but now celebrated in many key areas of the country, this holiday features lavish family dinners, fairs and games.

Jambay Lhakhang Drup – October 28 to November 1

As Bhutan's oldest temple, Jambay Lhakhang is an important historic site for the kingdom and its festival is celebrated lavishly with elaborate masked dances, drumbeats, clown and folk dances. The highlight of the festival however is the "Mewang," a vibrant fire ceremony held in the evening.

Prakhar Duchhoed, Bumthang – October 29 to 31

A temple in the scenic Chumi Valley in Bumthang believed to be built with the help of langurs or white monkeys, this festival highlights this unique tale through dances and songs.



November

November 2023

The month of November marks the peak and the end of fall season in the Himalayas and as the riot of colours sweep through its final days in the kingdom, the religious festivals and royal holidays also reach its zenith.

Coronation Anniversary of His Majesty the King – November 1

A commemoration of the current king's coronation on November 2008, the year that also marked the 100 years of monarchy in Bhutan.

Lhabab Duchen – November 4

One of the four main holy Buddhist festivals honouring the four key events in the life of Buddha, marked by ceremonies, offerings and prayer. Referred to as Buddha's ascension, this holiday is a perfect time to visit temples and sacred sites where local Bhutanese visit for a pilgrimage.

Black Necked Crane Festival, Gangtey – November 11

One of Bhutan's most celebrated festivals, this one-day occasion celebrates the arrival of the endangered black necked cranes as they arrive from Tibet for the winter to roost across Phobjika Valley. For years, the cranes arrive through the valley by flying and encircling the Gangtey Monastery, earning them the moniker "heavenly birds." Featuring sacred dances as well as folk dances of songs, the highlight of the festival is the Crane Dance performed by the children of the local school. The uniqueness of the festival is tied to its celebration as a tool to promote nature conservation in Bhutan.

Birth Anniversary of the 4th Druk Gyalpo – November 11

A celebration of the beloved 4th King His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck's birthday. This day, the nation pays tribute to the milestones of his majesty who has ruled the country since 1972 until his abdication in 2006 in favour of his son, the current king.

As the founder of Bhutan's concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), his Majesty's birth anniversary also coincides with the GNH Day in Thimphu where a day-long international cultural festival is held at the Centenary Park in the heart of the capital.

Jambay Lhakhang Singye Cham, Bumthang – November 27

Another unique festival marked by a unique dance, this celebration in Bumthang's oldest temple is primarily focused on its "Singye Cham" or Lion Dance – a dance conducted to appease sentient beings and believed to wash away bad karma of those who witness the spectacle.

Nalakhar Tsechu, Bumthang – November 27 to 29

Celebrated in remote Nalakhar Village's Ngaa Lhakhang in the picturesque Choekhor Valley, this three-day festival is a stunning celebration of dances and songs. Its remote location means it does not receive too many tourists, thus rewarding intrepid travelers the opportunity to revel in a festival that is more rooted in authentic Bhutanese customs and celebrations that are intrinsically influenced by the kingdom's rural eastern cultures.



December



December 2023

The festive month of December marks the beginning of the Himalayan winter and the last of the kingdom's big festivals and national holidays cap off the season with pomp and circumstance.

Pangkhar Choedpa, Bumthang – December 2 to 5

Known as the Festival of the White Monkey, this is celebrated in Bumthang's Ura Valley – in a temple believed to be built by white langurs at night while humans did the construction by day. Highlighted by monkey dances, this three-day festivities pays homage to the legendary origins of the temple.

Druk Wangyel Tsechu, Dochula, Thimphu – December 13

A unique cultural festival organized by the Royal Family and performed by the Royal Bhutan Army rather than the monastic body, this festival celebrates the role of the army in protecting the nation's sovereignty.

Bhutan National Day – December 17

The National Day of Bhutan is a celebration marking the coronation of Ugyen Wangchuk in 1907, marking the birth of the modern Kingdom of Bhutan. Here, elaborate parades and performances are showcased to the public with the anticipated King's Speech capping off the grand ceremony.

Trongsa Tsechu – December 20 to 22

As the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family, the valley of Trongsa holds a special place in the psyche of all Bhutanese, and its main festival celebrates this royal connection with grandeur.

Namker Dho Festival – December 23

A community festival celebrated coinciding with the local new year for the two districts of Paro and Haa in west Bhutan. Namker which literally means 'white sky' was a vision seen by Lama Phaju Drugom Zhigpo at the location where the temple stands today. This celebration is marked by unique dances and rituals that is not seen by many, making this festival authentic and intimate.

Amankora Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Celebrations – December 24 to 25

Experience a Himalayan festive celebration surrounded by pine forests, the cool weather and hearty feasts available in all five Amankora Lodges.

Amankora New Year's Eve Celebrations – December 31

Focused on recollections of the year 2020 and looking forward to another year in 2021, let Amankora's five lodges be your home as you embark on a journey for the new year where we will organize blessing ceremonies, cultural performances, a feast of flavours and a deeply enriching celebration for blessed beginnings.



Winter Highlight: Winter High Altitude Training

Similar to the Summer High Altitude Training but with snow and winter landscapes on the forefront of the journeys, the Winter High Altitude Training is an intense 10-day training journey through daily hikes, bikes, and spa treatments designed around the setting of Amankora's five lodges.

Festival and cultural event dates stated in this calendar are not final and are subject to changes by the festival organizers, monastic body and the governing districts of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Reconfirmation with our Aman Reservations team at least a month before your holiday to the kingdom coinciding with specific festivals you wish to see and experience is essential.



Amankora

Bumthang, Gangtey, Paro, Punakha and Thimphu, Kingdom of Bhutan

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