

amankora



Daily Doses of Bliss in Bhutan

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.

2024 Highlights

January 2 - Nyilo or Bhutanese Winter Solstice festivities abound around the kingdom, filled with food, music and songs

February 10 to 11 - Usher in the new, auspicious Year of the Dragon with a multi-day celebration at Amankora lodges and a pilgrimage to the Land of the Thunder Dragon

February 19 to 21 - Punakha Tsechu is the biggest festival in Bhutan's former capital where magical dances and rituals are organised in the historic fortress

March 21 to 25 - March is packed with amazing and colourful festivals but the biggest of them all has to be the Paro Tsechu where locals bring out their most prized gho and kira outfits

April 18 to 20 - Head to Bumthang for a historic celebration of Domkhar Tsechu, a festival celebrated in the tiny village since the 1700s

June 16 - A celebration of the birth of Guru Rinpoche, Bhutan's most revered holy man credited for the founding of the Tiger's Nest and many important sacred structures in the kingdom

August - The whole month of August is when the world's most prized mushroom - the matsutake come in full glory from the ground and festivals unfold in Thimphu (15-16) and Bumthang (23-24)

September 2 - The world's most grueling mountain biking race, the Tour of the Dragon hopes to return this year

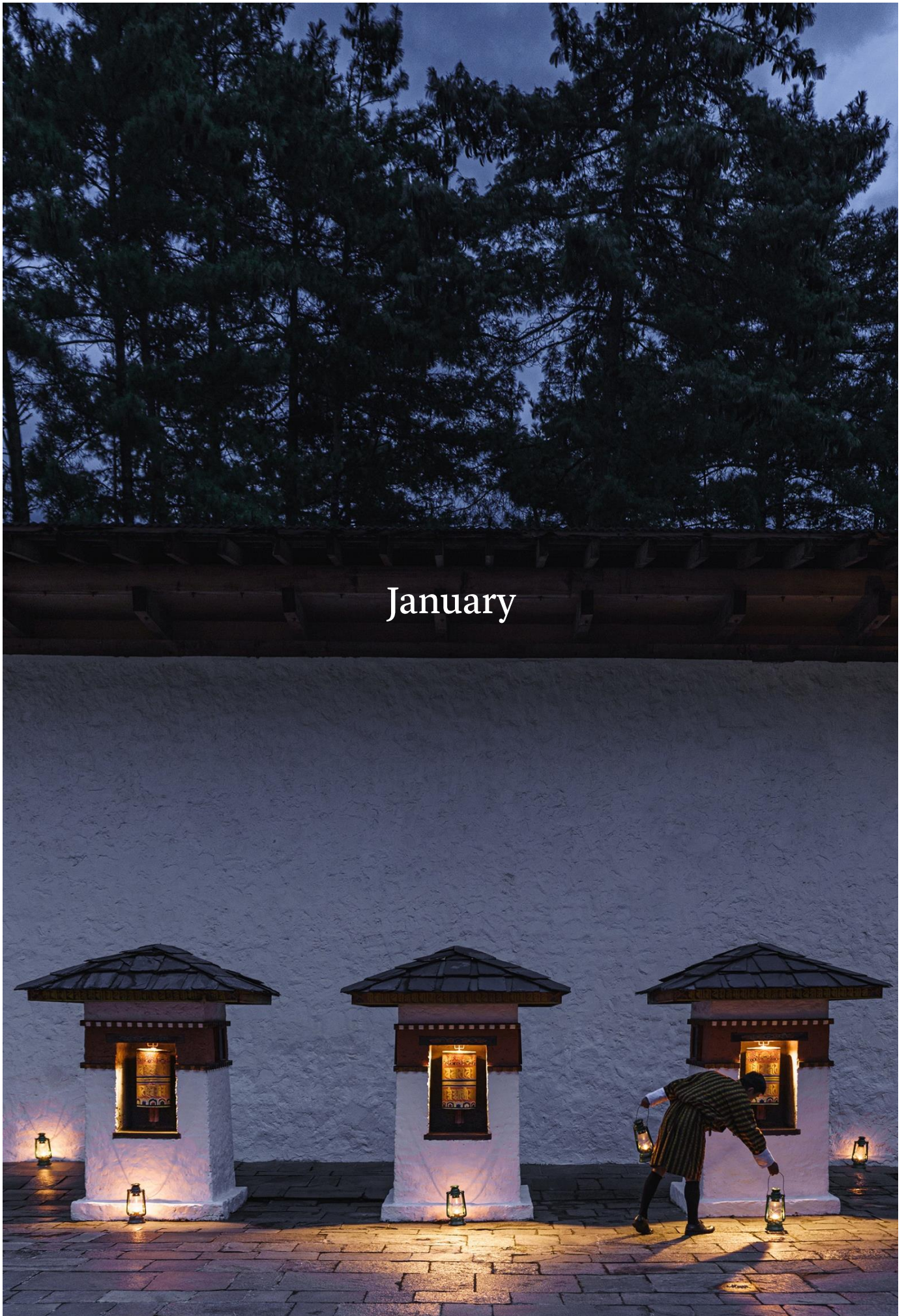
September 13 to 15 - The capital's biggest celebration, this festival brings the city's top celebrities and personalities to the Tashichho Dzong for mesmerising dances, rituals and music

November 11 - The bucolic valley of Phobjika comes alive with the winter arrival of the endangered Black Necked Cranes where a bright festival comes at Gangtey Goempa Monastery

December 13 - The Druk Wangyel Tsechu, organised by the Royal Family and the Royal Bhutan Army is a unique festival unlike any other



January





January 2024

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 world greet you with wishes and blessings of infinite possibilities.

Winter Solstice (Nyilo) - January 2

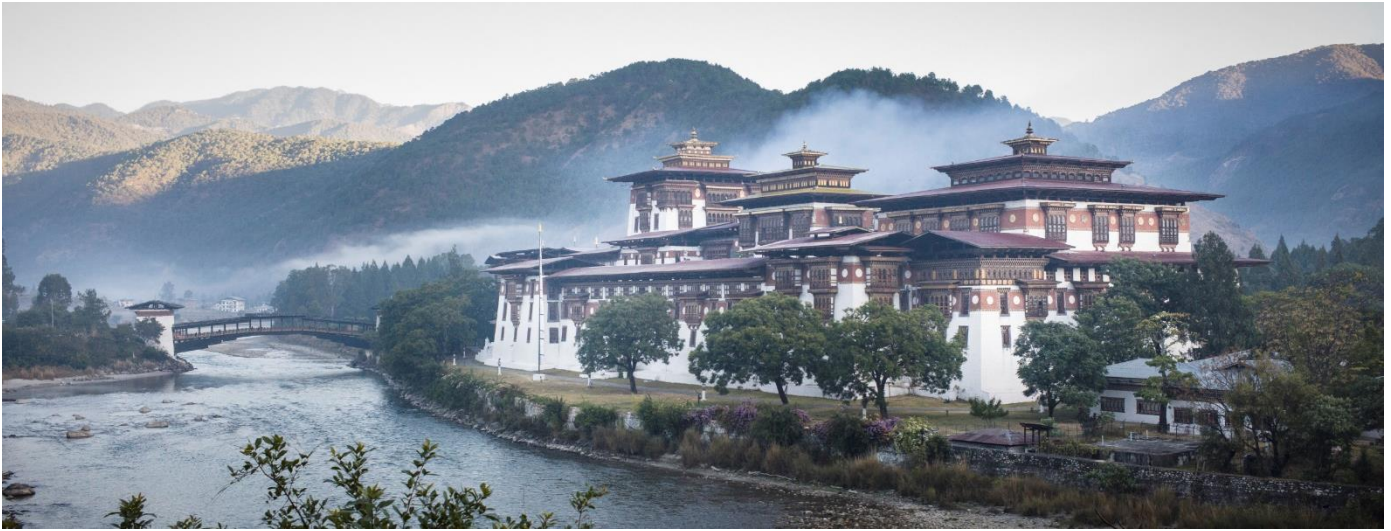
A celebration marked by offerings and songs, the Nyilo is a religious holiday marked by temple visits and songs. Amankora Thimphu regularly hosts a children's choir to celebrate Nyilo with traditional songs in the Living Room and Dining Room.

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.



February



February 2024

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 Tang 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.

Losar (Lunar New Year) - February 10 to 11
Amankora's five lodges ring in the new zodiac Year of the Dragon with evenings of celebrations featuring an Asian feast, astrology readings and cultural performances.

International Valentine's Day - February 14
For couples traveling around the Amankora circuit on Valentine's Day, special romantic dinners can be arranged. For guests seeking to reaffirm their union, blessing ceremonies and renewal of vows can be done in the five Amankora lodges and the different cultural sites around the valleys.

Festival of Mahakali - February 14 to 17
A distinct festival unique to Trongsa, a beautiful town between Gangtey and Bumthang, honouring the nation's guardian deity Pelden Lhamo or Mahakali.

Punakha Drubchen - February 16 to 18
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.

Punakha Tsechu - February 19 to 21
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.

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.

Tharpaling Thongdrol (Unfurling of the Holy Scroll) Chumi, Bumthang - Feb 24
Similar to the unfurling of the giant scroll in Punakha's Tsechu, except for 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.

Tangsibi Mani - February 25 to 27
The festival takes place at Tangsibi Tashiling Lhakhang in Ura, Bumthang. Its origins can be traced back to the Tibetan Treasure discoverer, Sherab Mebar, who visited Bhutan and established himself at this very location.



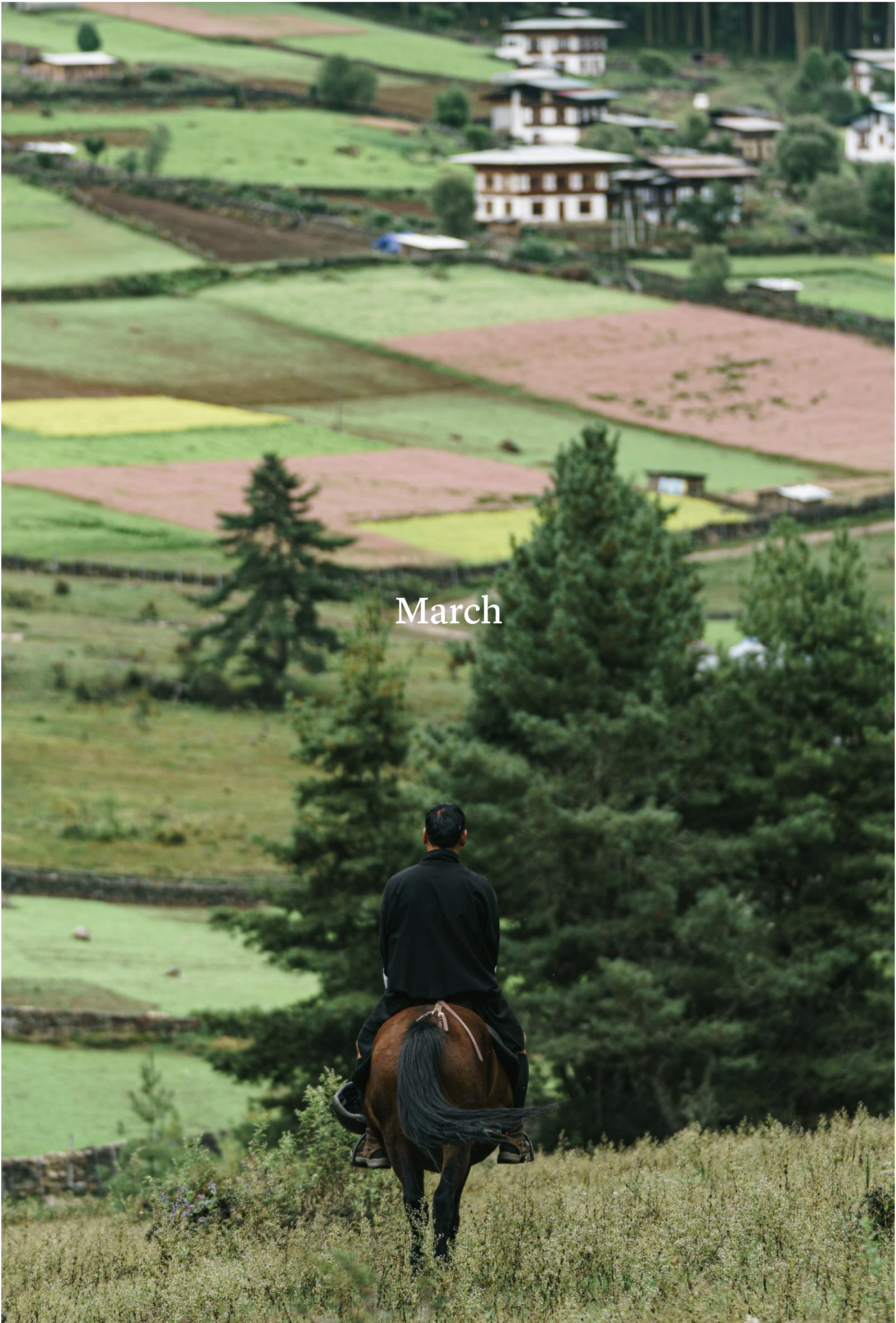
Winter Highlight: Year of the Dragon Lunar New Year Celebration

As the Land of the Thunder Dragon, add a deeper meaning to the luck and blessings ushered in by the coming of this auspicious year by climbing the dragon's most important symbol - the Tiger's Nest Monastery as well as the Dzongdrangkhang Temple, considered to be Bhutan's 2nd Tiger's Nest. Have a blessing in the temple or light 108 butter lamps for posterity.



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 to February) and around Punakha, they bring with them their fascinating culture through their herds of yak, unique weaving cultures, iconic hats and handicrafts.



March



March 2024

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 their 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.

Bhutan International Marathon and Half Marathon - March 2

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.

Zhuri Duechoed, Chumey, Bumthang - March 5 to 7

Set in Zhuri Lhakhang, a small but scenic temple in Chumey Valley in Bumthang, this festival is an intimate but authentic rural celebration in one of the untouched corners of Bhutan.

Gasa Tsechu - March 16 to 19

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.

Talo Tsechu, Talo Goempa, Punakha - March 17 to 19

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.

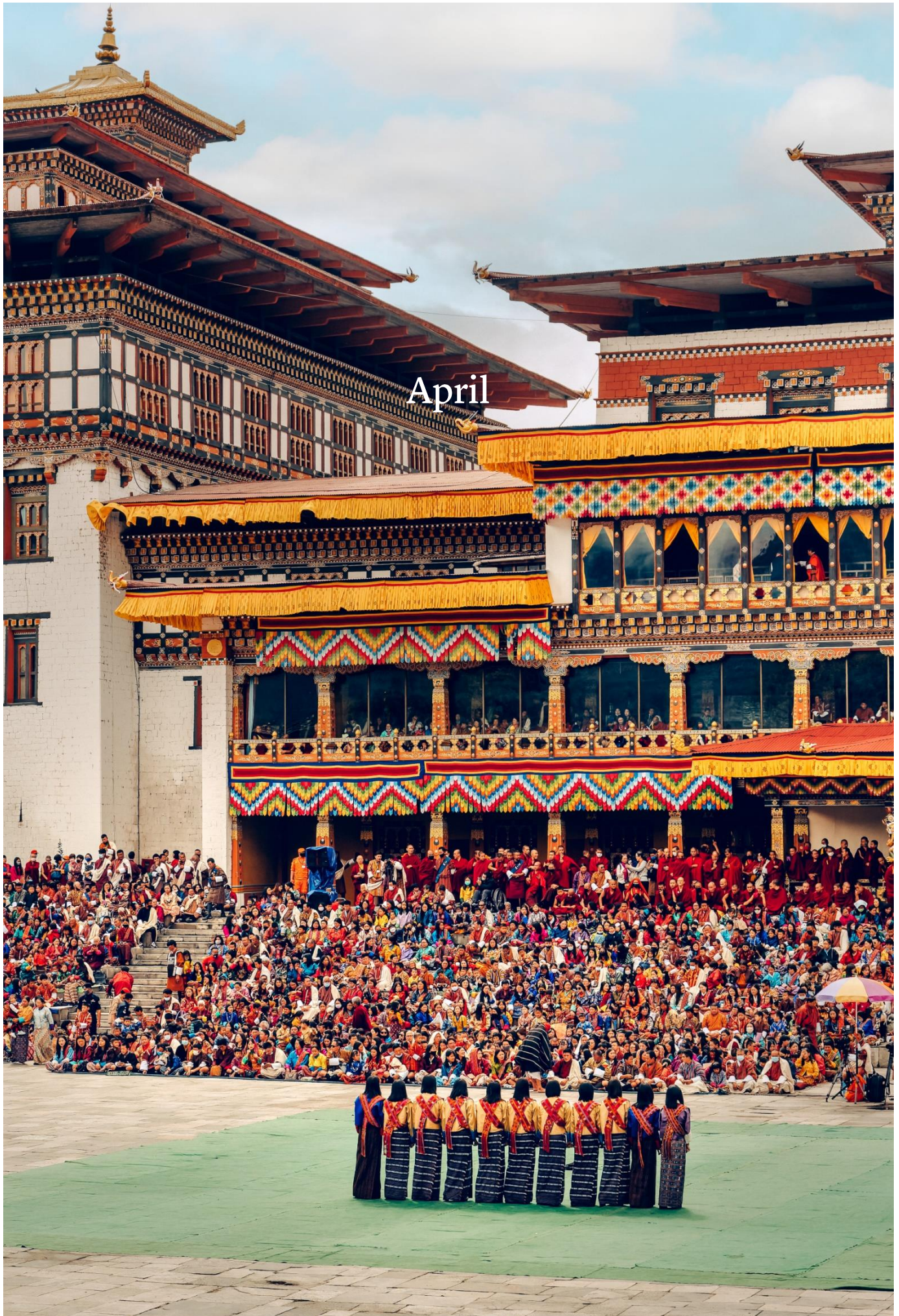
Dzongdrangkha Tsechu - March 20 to 26

Located on the outskirts of Paro, this cliff-hanging village is one of the holiest yet less-visited sites - considered as Bhutan's second Tiger's Nest.

Paro Tsechu - March 21 to 25

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

April





April 2024

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.

Rhododendron Festival, Dochula, Thimphu - April 13 to 14

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 18

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 hold sacred ceremonies and locals light up butter lamps.

Domkhar Tsechu, Bumthang - April 18 to 20

A three-day festival celebrated since the 1700s as initiated by Serkhong Truelkhu in western Bumthang's Domkhar Village. The colourful and historical festivities are marked by sacred chams and masked dances deriving their 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.

Ura Yakchoe, Bumthang - April 20 to 24

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.



May



May 2024

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.

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.

Lord Buddha's Parinirvana - May 23

A sacred holiday honouring Buddha's nirvana or gaining enlightenment. Many Bhutanese will go on pilgrimage to holy sites and temples are set with ceremonies to bless pilgrims. Some of the country's holiest relics and statuary are also put on display. The Phajoding Temple high above Amankora is a holy site to celebrate this occasion.



June



June 2024

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, the mountains turn into an electric shade of green and the first harvests of the season give every kitchen and dining table songs to warble about.

Nimalung Tsechu, Bumthang – June 14 to 16

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 16

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 is an important task to accomplish for many Bhutanese.

Kurjey Tsechu, Bumthang - June 16

Celebrated in one of Bumthang Valley's most sacred temples, 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 2024

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.

First Sermon of Lord Buddha - July 10

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. A small festival in Tandin Ney in Thimphu also happens on this day.

Haa Summer Festival - July 12 to 14

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.



August



August 2024

After a month of light rains sprinkling the grounds, the valleys and mountains 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 in its 12th 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 - August 15 to 16

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 at 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: Rafting and Kayaking

The melting glacial ice of the Himalayan peaks becomes more pronounced in summer, driving vast volumes of water to the Mother and Father Rivers in Punakha Valley, making this season the most exciting time to ride the rapids with Rafting or Kayaking activities.



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, making it the best season for foodies. Matsutake mushrooms, fiddlehead ferns, chilies and flowers abound from farm to table.

September



September 2024

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 9 to 10
Consecration day and ceremonies leading to the capital's biggest festival, the Thimphu Tsechu.

Wangdue Tsechu - September 11 to 13
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.

Thimphu Tsechu - September 13 to 15
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 13 to 15

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

Gangtey Tsechu - September 16 to 18

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 are a true delight for any photographer and reveler.

Tangmi Mewang - September 18 to 19

Jampa Lhakhang Drup - November 15 to 18
Two of the most popular festivals in Bumthang, the festival's biggest crowd drawers are the fire dances and the purification rituals using fire and the naked dances performed in Jambay Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest temples. 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.

Blessed Rainy Day (Thue Bup) - September 23

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



October



October 2024

As autumn swings in full force, Bhutan's colours transform 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.

Dashain (Southern Bhutanese Holiday) - October 12

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.

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.



November

November 2024

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

Coronation Anniversary of His Majesty the King - November 1

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

Jakar Tsechu - November 10 to 12

As Bumthang's main administrative valley, Jakar is an important center in the east and its three-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.

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.

Dechenphug Tsechu, Thimphu - November 11

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

Black Necked Crane Festival, Gangtey - November 11

One of Bhutan's most celebrated festivals, this 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.

Changangkha Lhakhang Tsechu - November 14

Less grandiose than the well-known Thimphu Tsechu, this festival holds a more intimate atmosphere. It is an annual ritual that commences with a tribute to the local deity "Domsap" featuring a sequence of masked dances and traditional Bhutanese dance performances.

Prakhar Duchhoed, Bumthang - November 16 to 18

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

Lhabab Duchen (Buddha's Ascension) - November 22

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.



December



December 2024

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.

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.

Jambay Lhakhang Singye Cham, Bumthang - December 15

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 the bad karma of those who witness the spectacle.

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.

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.

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.

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Amankora

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