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# Festivals Calendar

## 2018 & 2019

Festival or 'Tshechu' in the local language is a religious event celebrated every year in various monasteries, temples and fortresses across the Kingdom of Bhutan. The dates and duration of the festivals vary from one district to another but they are always held on or around the 10th day of the lunar calendar corresponding to the birthday of Guru Padmasambhava, an 8th century Buddhist scholar.

During Tshechus, dances are performed by monks as well as laymen wearing ornate costumes and masks; each aspect of dance has a symbolic meaning. Some of these festivals are observed to purify one's soul and ward off evil spirits. The Thimphu Tshechu, Paro Tshechu and Jambay Lhakhang Drup are among the biggest in terms of participation and audience. Most Tshechus also feature the unfurling of a Thongdroel (or thangkha) – an embroidered painting. Thongdroels are especially impressive examples of Buddhist art and are considered so sacred that simply seeing a Thongdroel is said to cleanse the viewer of sin.

Note- The festival dates are tentative and subject to change.

# 1 JANUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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25 Punakha Tsechu

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# Punakha Tsechu

Punakha Dzong, Punakha

February 25 – 27, 2018/ February 15 – 17, 2019

In 2005, a festival called Punakha Tsechu was introduced in response to requests for better preservation of Buddhist teachings and to keep alive the noble deeds of Zhabdrung Rimpoche.

This festival not only plays an important role in preserving Bhutan's rich culture and traditions but also provides devout Buddhists with an opportunity for prayer and pilgrimage. It reflects the richness of the Bhutanese cultural heritage and is very special in the eyes and hearts of both the Bhutanese people and the tourists.





# 3 MARCH

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24 Gomphu Kora

31 Chhorten Kora

27 Paro Tshechu

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# Gomphu Kora

Gom Kora Lhakhang, Trashigang

March 24-26, 2018/ March 14-16, 2019

Gomphu Kora lies in the heart of the agrarian belt of eastern Bhutan.

In Chokoey (a classical script), Gomphu means 'Meditation Cave' and Kora means 'Circumambulation'. The name is derived from a cave formed out of a rock-face next to a temple that has been built as a tribute to this scared site. The story of Gomphu Kora goes back to the 8th century AD. Legend has it that an evil spirit called Myongkhapa escaped from Samye in Tibet, where Guru Padmasambhava, the progenitor of the Nyingma strand of Buddhism, was spreading the Dharma in the Himalayas. Myongkhapa concealed himself inside a rock where Gomphu Kora stands today. The Guru followed the evil, meditated for three days inside the rock cave and finally vanquished it.

The Gomphu Kora temple was renovated and enlarged in the 15th and 16th centuries.

'Go around Gomphu Kora today for tomorrow may be too late', so goes a local song that entices devotees to visit Gomphu Kora. The place comes alive, once every year, when people all over eastern Bhutan descend upon the narrow valley, dressed in fineries, to partake in the festivity, to worship and to reunite themselves with their illustrious past.





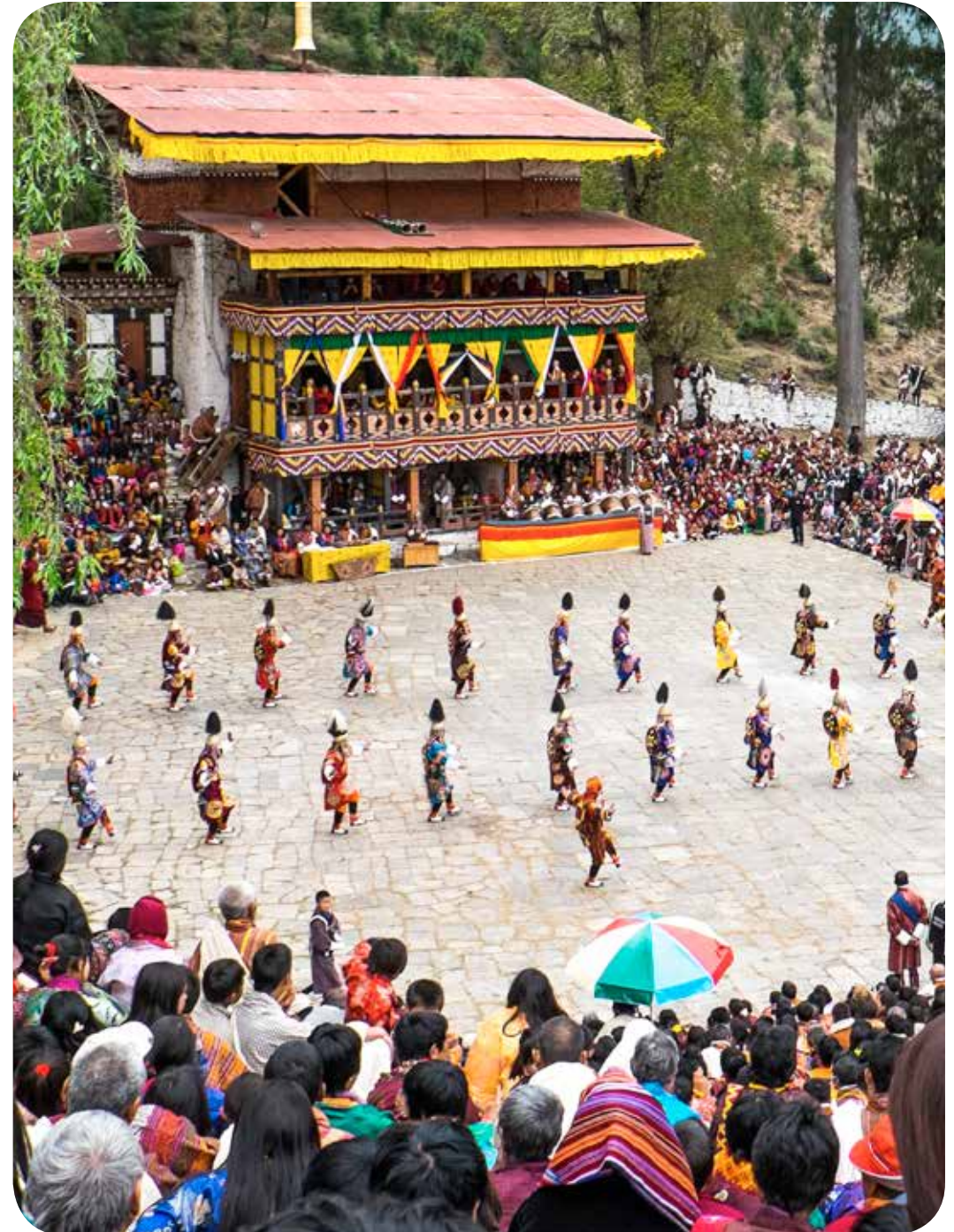
# Paro Tshechu

Rinpung Dzong, Paro

March 27 – 31, 2018 / March 17 – 21, 2019

Paro Tshechu is one of the most popular festivals in Bhutan, held annually since the 17th century when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the founder of the state of Bhutan, and Ponpo Rigzin Nyingpo initiated the festival together with the consecration of Paro Dzong (fortress) in 1644. Featuring dances performed by trained monks as well as laymen in amazing masks and costumes, Paro Tshechu (festival) is one of the best ways to experience Bhutan's ancient living culture. The festival is observed in three specific parts – the pre-festival rituals on the first day, ceremonies are undertaken on the second day inside the Paro Dzong and the main festivities on the festival ground on the remaining three days.

A highlight of Paro Tsechu is the unfurling of the silk Thangkha – so large that it covers the facade of an entire building and is considered one of the most sacred blessings in the whole of Bhutan. The 'Thangkha, known in Bhutan as a 'thongdroel' is a religious picture scroll, and is only exhibited for a few hours at daybreak on the final day of the festival enabling the people to obtain its blessing. This holy scroll 'confers liberation by the mere sight of it'.





# Chhorten Kora

Chorten Kora, Tashiyangtse

March 31 – April 16, 2018/

March 21 – April 05, 2019

The Chorten Kora Festival is one of the most popular events in eastern Bhutan. 'Kora' means circumambulation and the main activity of the festival is circumambulating the Chorten Kora. This festival brings out colorful aspects of Bhutanese culture such as mask dances, and the rich textiles and brocades worn by the locals amidst the triumphant atmosphere of the festival itself.

Dakpa Kora is held on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month corresponding to 28<sup>th</sup> February and Drukpa Kora (circumbulation by the Bhutanese) is held on the 30<sup>th</sup> day corresponding to 15<sup>th</sup> March every year.

The Chorten (Stupa) was built by Lama Ngawang Loday in 1740 at the site, where a demon was subdued. It is believed to be a replica of the Boudhnath stupa in Nepal and was consecrated by the 13<sup>th</sup> chief Abbot of Bhutan Je Sherub Wangchuk. Today, it is considered one of the most important historical Buddhist structures.

A legend states that a young girl from Tawang, believed to have been a Khando (Dakini) agreed to be buried alive inside the Chorten. For this reason, the ritual known as Dakpa Kora is organized every year, wherein hundreds of people from Arunachal Pradesh known as the Dakpas visit Chorten Kora to circumambulate.





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26 Ura Yakchoe

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# Ura Yakchoe

Ura Lhakhang, Bumthang

April 26 – 29, 2018/ April 16 – 20, 2019

Ura is a strikingly beautiful village in Central Bhutan. As per local legends, the Ura community once prayed to Guru Padmasambhava to save them from an outbreak of leprosy. The Guru responded by magically sending a charmed statue of the Buddhist deity Vajrapani. Finally, when the statue reached Gadan, a nine-headed snake rose out of the place that is now known as 'the nine-headed snake' (*puguyungdhogo*) and slithered out of the valley. Leprosy, the disease spread by the serpents, was eventually overcome by the blessing of Vajrapani, the subjugator of the subterranean world.

The Yakchoe is a commemoration of this important event and an offering in gratitude. It formally begins on the 12th of the third Bhutanese month with a procession from Gadan to Ura. The Vajrapani relic and the Gadan Lam are received by Ura's priests in a long procession through scenic landscapes and past *chortens* and *mani* walls.

Having arrived in Ura, the *gomchens* perform their dance tests and a religious ceremony dedicated to Vajrapani, which begins with the ritual of exorcism. This religious ritual continues for several days in early mornings and late evenings, while several masked, religious dances alternated by folk dances occupy most of the daytime. The festival ends on the fifth day.





# 5 MAY

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# 7 JULY

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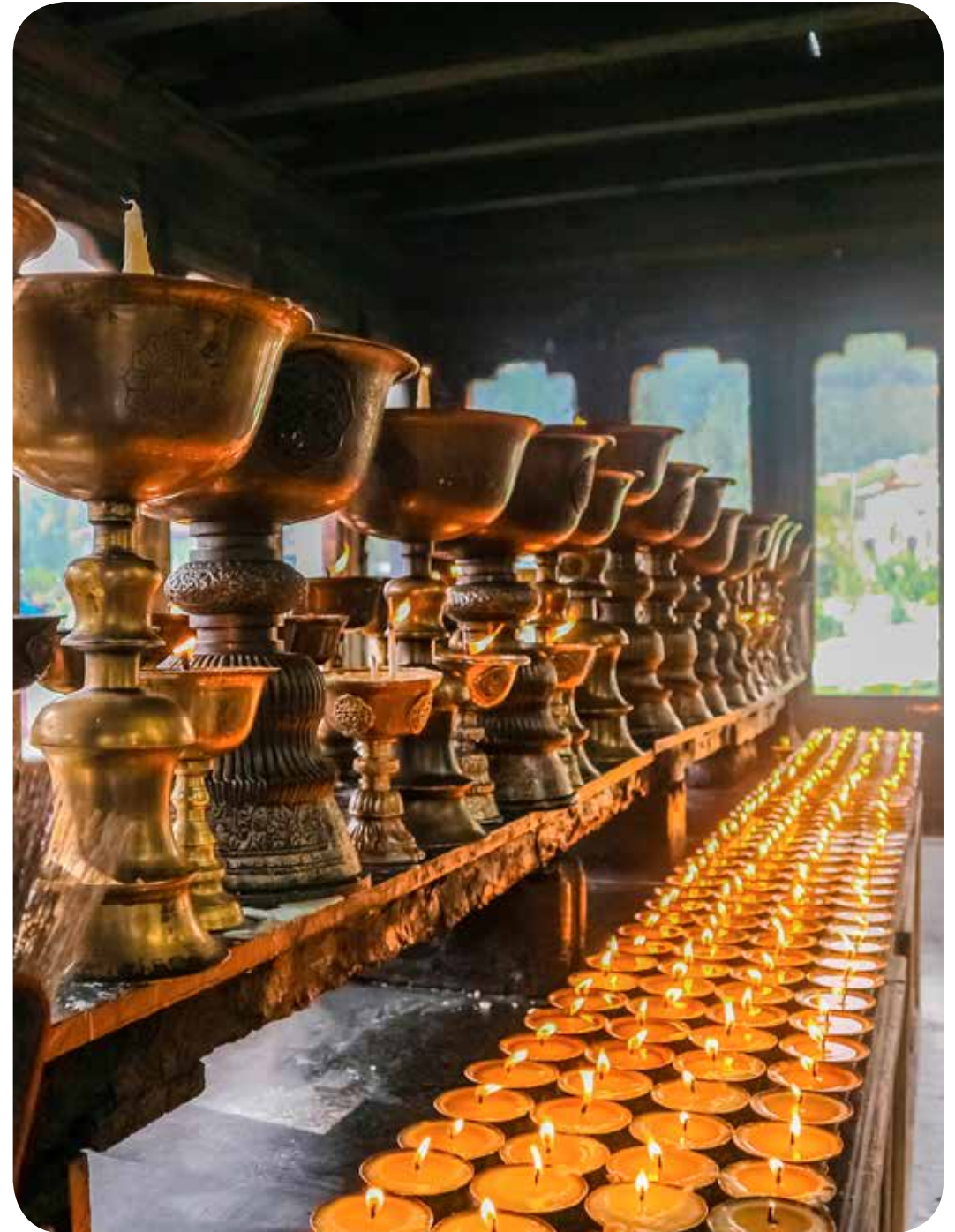
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17 Wangdue Tshechu

23 Thangbi Mani

19 Thimphu Tshechu

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# Wangdue Tshechu

Tencholing Army Ground, Wangduephodrang  
September 17 – 19, 2018 / October 05 – 07, 2019

The annual Wangduephodrang Tshechu was introduced by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal after the completion of the dzong (fort cum monastery). The three-day annual Tshechu is attended by people from Punakha and Thimphu and provides the people with an occasion for merrymaking and revelry. The Tshechu is known for the Raksha Mangcham or the Dance of the Ox. It concludes with the unfurling of the Guru Tshengye Thongdrol where people throng to receive blessings.

Note: Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag Dzong was burnt to the ground on the 24th of June 2012. Plans are well underway to re-build it. While the Tshechu will be held, please confirm the location with your tour operator. After the fire, the Tshechu was held at the nearby Tencholing Army ground in Wangduephodrang.





# Thimphu Tshechu

Tashi Chhodzong, Thimphu

September 19 – 21, 2018 / October 07 – 09, 2019

Thimphu Tshechu, held in Bhutan's capital city, was initiated by the 4th Temporal Ruler of Bhutan, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgay, in 1867. The festival underwent a change in the 1950s, when the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, introduced numerous Boed Chhams (mask dances performed by monks). The addition also added colour without compromising the spiritual significance.

Thimphu festival begins on the 9th day and ends on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the eighth Bhutanese month. Generally, the four-day Tshechu program consists of 24 folk songs and 25 sacred dances. Usually the program for each day begins by 9 a.m.

Since the year of its establishment in 1687, Thimphu Tshechu was performed inside Trashichhoedzong courtyard until 2007. However, because of the steady increase in attendees, the inner courtyard became too congested to properly perform the rites. Therefore, to accommodate a growing number of viewers, a new Tshechu stadium was constructed and named Tendrel Thang, meaning 'Auspicious Ground'.



# Thangbi Mani

Bumthang

September 23 – 25, 2018 / October 10 – 13, 2019

The Thangbi Mani festival is held at Thangbi Lhakhang, which was founded in 1470 by Shamar Rinpoche of the Kagyupa religious school.

Located at an elevation of 2730m, the historically significant Thangbi Temple is one of the temples managed by lay monks called Gomchens who are responsible for all rituals. The festival is organized jointly by the people of the three villages of Bumthang, Thangbi, Goling. The Gomchens of the monastery exhibit vibrant rituals, and young boys and girls wear masks of demons and animals to showcase hypnotizing masked dances and other paraphernalia, believed to have hidden powers to bless onlookers with unending fortune. Also, it is local belief that those who manage to jump over the magical flame here three times, will be protected from every impending misfortune for at least one year.

Thangbi Mani festival starts on 14<sup>th</sup> and concludes on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of 8th Bhutanese month.





# 10 OCTOBER

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24 Jambay Lhakhang Drup

25 Prakhar Tschechu

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# Jambay Lhakhang Drup

Bumthang

October 24 – 27, 2018 / November 13 – 16, 2019

Jambay Lhakhang is one of the oldest temples in the kingdom, founded by Songtsen Gampo, a Tibetan King in the 7th century AD. The king was destined to build 108 temples known as Thadhul- Yangdhul (temples on and across the border) in a day to subdue a demoness. This temple is one of them.

One of the most spectacular festivals in the country, called Jambay Lhakhang Drup is hosted here with a dual purpose and agenda. Firstly, it is a tribute to Guru Rinpoche, a saint who introduced Tantric form of Buddhism in the country and secondly, this festival commemorate the establishment of Jambay Lhakhang (temple) in the 8th century.

During the festival, a variety of traditional and mask dances are performed. Each dance has a significant meaning. However, the highlight of Jambay Lhakhang Drup remains the fire ceremony named 'Mewang' and the religious dance known as 'Tercham'.

Apart from these, the other activities include- a famous drum beat dance, a clown dance called Dola Pangtoy Shazam, Raksha Mangcham (a dance symbolizing life after death) and many more. With the proceedings of the events, this festival captures the attention of the onlookers and creates a magnificent spectacle.





# Prakhar Tschechu

Bumthang

October 25 – 27, 2018 / November 14 – 16, 2019

This annual festival is held at the Prakhar Lhakhang in the Chumi Valley of Bumthang, which is about a half an hour drive from Chamkhar town. Built in the 16th century, it is the main temple of the village and is a roughly 10-minute walk from the road. It is said that monkeys helped in building this Lhakhang, wherein humans would work during the day and the monkeys would take over in the night. Hence the name, 'Prakhar', which means 'White Monkey'.

The festival lasts for 3 days from the 16th to the 18th of the ninth lunar month in the Bhutanese calendar. It is celebrated to honor Lama Thukse Dawa, one of the sons of the 15th century Buddhist master, Tertön Pema Lingpa, who was one of the greatest Buddhist masters to be ever born in Bhutan. Several kinds of mask dances are performed during the festival.



# 11 NOVEMBER

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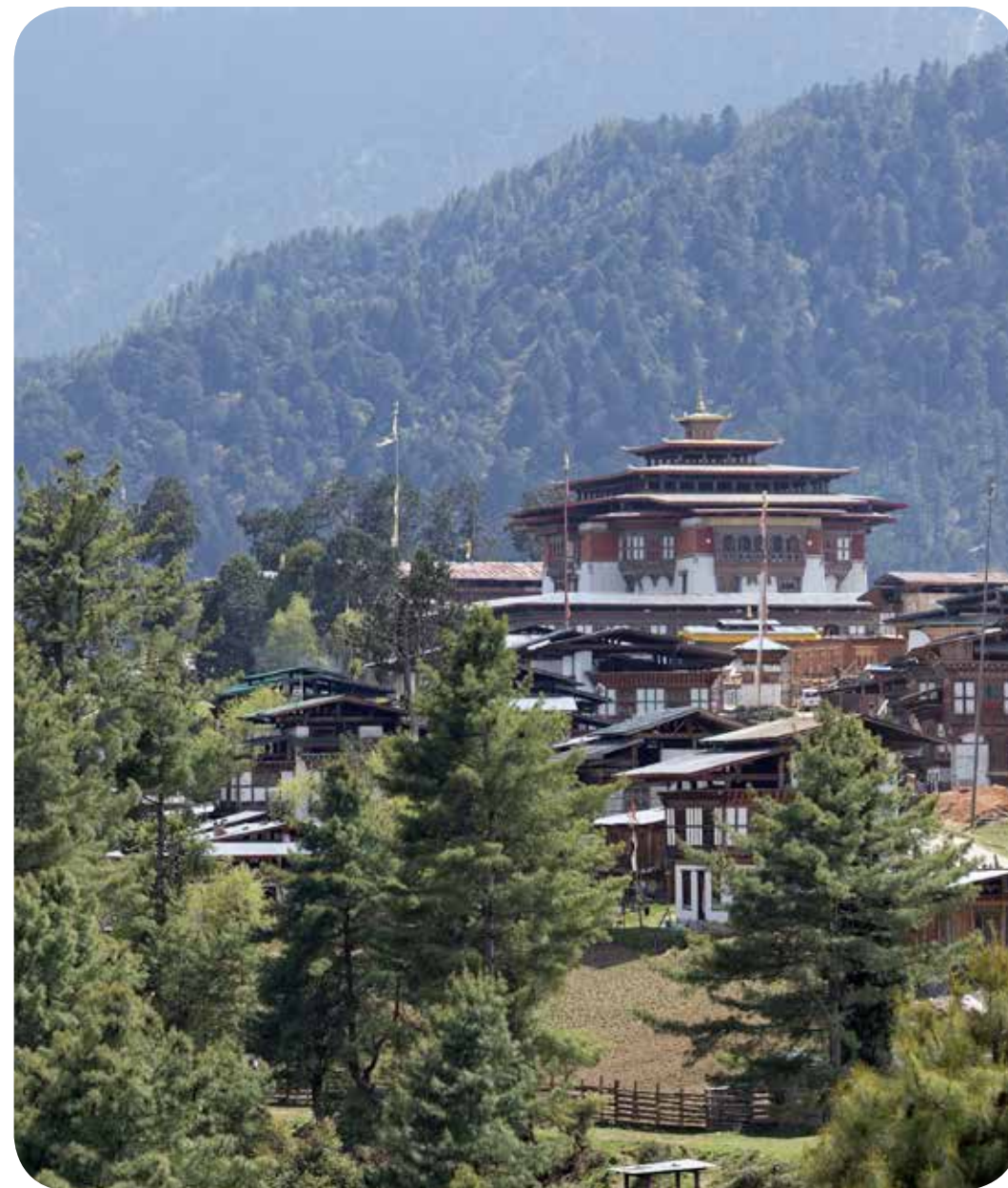
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11 Black Neck Crane Festival

15 Mongar Tshechu

17 Trashigang Tshechu

23 Nalakhari Tshechu

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# Black-Necked Crane Festival

Gangtey Monastery, Phobjikha

November 11, 2018 / November 11, 2019

The annual Black-necked cranes festival is held at Phobjikha on 11th November. The festival was initiated by RSPN (Royal Society for Protection of Nature) since 1998 in an effort to promote community based-sustainable tourism in the valley and to raise awareness among visitors and the local community on the importance of crane conservation. It is also an occasion for local people to socialize, rejoice, and celebrate the arrival of cranes in their valley.

The crane festival is now organized by the local community group and it entails lot of logistic arrangements and co-ordination and usually involves several people, including children. The festival generally comprises a variety of cultural performances like traditional dances and dramas related to cranes and mask dances. The crane dance performed by the children during the festival is the most amusing and entertaining part of the show.



# Mongar Tshechu

Mongar Dzong, Mongar

November 15 – 18, 2018 / December 04 – 06, 2019

Mongar district, previously known as Zhongar, is one of the six districts that make up eastern Bhutan, bordering Bumthang, Lhuntse, Pemagatshel and Trashigang districts. The region's landscape is spectacular with stark cliffs, gorges and dense conifer forests, while the area is notably famous for its textiles, fabrics and wood carvings.

The 3-day long Mongar Tshechu is the most exciting annual festival, besides several local festivals. Celebrated inside the Dzong, draws people from as far as Trashigang, Trashiyangtse and Lhuentse. The festival includes numerous mask dances and is one of the most important events in the area.





# Trashigang Tshechu

Trashigang

November 17 – 19, 2018 / December 05 – 07, 2019

The annual 3-day distinctive Trashigang Tshechu is one of the biggest festivals in eastern Bhutan and is held at Trashigang Dzong, during the 7th to the 11th day of the 10th month in the Bhutanese calendar. The Tshechu is attended by the Brokpas, a semi-nomadic tribe in the valleys of Merak and Sakteng. Also, the Khengpa community and people from as far as Samdrup Jongkhar, Pema Gatshel and Trashiyangtse come to the festival.

Preparations for the Tshechu begin two days prior to the actual festival. On the 7th day of the month, the monks perform ceremonial ablutions. On the 8th day, they have rehearsals in preparation for the Tshechu. Then on the 9th day, the Tshechu formally begins. On the 10th day, the Thongdroel (large tapestry) of Neten Chudrug (Sixteen Arhats) is unfurled amidst a flurry of mask dances. On the final day, the old Thongdroel of Guru Tshengyed (eight manifestation of Guru Rinpoche) is displayed. The unfurling is accompanied by the performance of Guru Tshengyed Chhams.





# Nalakhar Tshechu

Choekhor, Bumthang

November 23 – 25, 2018 / December 12 – 14, 2019

Ngang lhakhang, sometimes also spelt as Nalakhar, is a private temple built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by a Tibetan lama called Namkha Samdrup.

It's a two-storeyed structure. The lower temple has beautiful statues of Guru Rinpoche as padmakara with his two consorts. The upper temple is a *gonkhang* dedicated to protective deities and houses the masks for the festival.

The community holds a festival from the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> day to the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese month. The family members from the two main lineages of Samdang Dung (said to be descendants of the 8<sup>th</sup> Tibetan King Trisong Detsen) who had settled there, and the Ngang Lhakhang Choeje, heirs of Lama Namkha Samdrup, play a central role.

People from all over the village and from various parts in Bhutan visit the festival annually in order to celebrate and to pray for better harvest, prosperity and happiness of the villages and the whole country of Bhutan. The spectators dress in their finest National Bhutanese Dress and also relish the special Bhutanese packed lunch namely Shaakam Paa (Dried Meat) with Rice and Ema Datshi (Chilli curry made with lot of cheese).





# 12 DECEMBER

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15 Trongsa Tshechu

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# Trongsa Tshechu

Trongsa Dzong, Trongsa

December 15 – 17, 2018/ January 04 – 07, 2020

Of the many festivals held in various parts of Trongsa, the grandest is the 3-day annual Tshechu, held at the northern courtyard of Trongsa Dzong. This festival brings together people from all walks of life and falls sometime in the month of December. In addition to traditional mask dances, visitors can witness the unfurling of the sacred Thongdroel. It is believed that merely seeing a Thongdroel grants immense spiritual merit to the onlooker. One also gets the chance to receive blessings from high-ranking monks. Furthermore, people get blessings from the sacred Nangtens on the last day of the Tshechu.

