

INDO ASIA DIARIES

Issue 13 | April 2016



INDO ASIA TOURS

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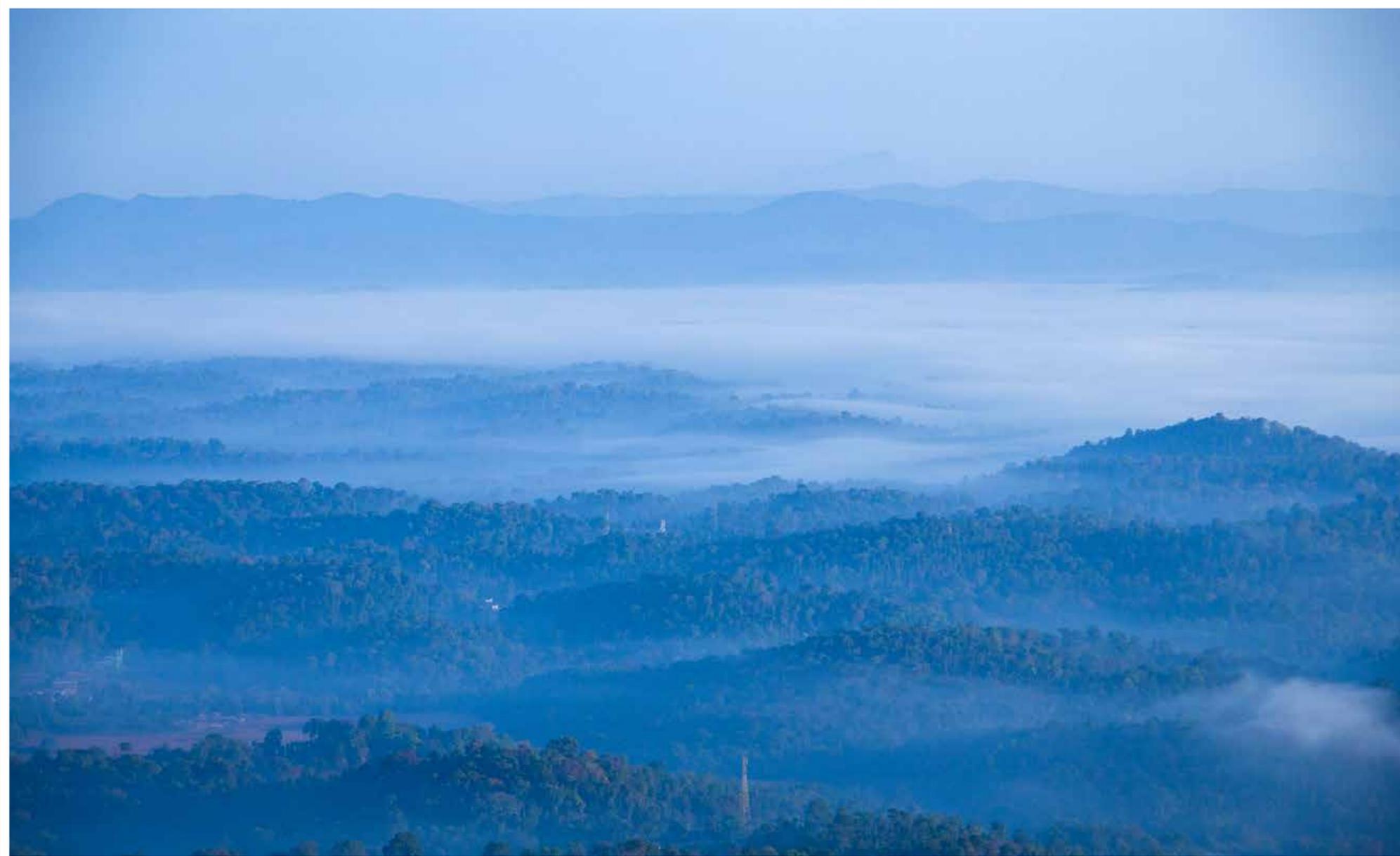
CROSSING
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IA SAYS

Photo Courtesy : Aditya Karnad



Dan Henver

Australia born Dan Henver was never bereft of exotic locations around him. But when he set foot in India, he admits that it was, “something else”. Dan travelled in the southern part of the country, when it was reeling under soaring degrees of end May. He found respite in the Western Ghat (a range that skirts the south west coast of India) and found it exhilarating. ***A trip to Coorg finally redeemed him from lack of planning well – he should have been in the lower Himalayas- where he went on several hikes and soaked in the fresh crispy air of the mountains.*** This photograph was taken on one such morning, when he was hiking close to the Brahmagiri Range with the owner of a homestay that he was staying at. The stacks of mountains dipped in the low hanging clouds gave a mystical touch to the view.



NUDGE THE STORYTELLER IN YOU TO SUBMIT A PHOTOGRAPH FROM YOUR TRAVELS AND WIN A TRIP TO EXPLORE THE MARVELS OF INDIA.

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LOOKING OVER THE PEAKS OF THE WESTERN GHATS

Photo Location : Coorg, Karnataka



The vibrant colours of the festivals in Bhutan

It is no surprise that a festival amplifies a travel experience by a far stretch. ***It is the time of the year that sheen of happiness and relaxation encompasses a destination and locals are even more eager to share their local traditions with people visiting.*** Travelling to Bhutan during these festivals is sure to add a great dimension to your travels. ***Many of Bhutan's festivals are spiritual in nature, commemorating the great Buddhist teachers of the land. Monasteries and villages around them are the best places to see the full scope of the reverence that people still feel.*** Since Bhutan is a small country, if planned properly, you can see more than one festival in a trip.

Wangdue Tschechu, September – Held at the Tencholing Army Ground of in Wangduephodrang, this is a three-day festival of masked and folk dances of the country. ***Different dances like that of the ' Lord of death', 'Stag and the hounds' and 'black hats' are performed. This features dance by monks and other laymen, where on the final day, a huge and colorful thangka painting on silk with embroidery, is displayed for everyone to see.*** The Annual Wangduephodrang Tschechu was held at Wangdue Dzong, which sadly, burned to the ground in June 2012, and is now held at the new venue.

Tamshing Phala Cheopa, October - Tamshing Phala Choepa festival is held in the 16th century Tamshing Monastery of Bumthang. ***You can expect a more sedate and spiritual experience rather than one of excitement. The festival appeals to those looking to get immersed in the peaceful atmosphere of the monastery.*** Watch monks perform rituals and daily chants, which transport you to a time of intense devotion and connection to the Buddhist Bhutanese saint Pema Lingpa, who started this monastery.



Masked dances are the highlight of all monastery festivals

Black Necked Crane Festival, November – Held at the Gangtey Gonpa in Phobjikha, the annual black-necked crane festival is a unique event that is aimed at awareness and understanding of conserving the endangered Black-necked cranes of Bhutan. ***The larger message of the festival is linked to strengthen conservation, economic welfare and sustainable livelihoods of the community and show commitment to conservation of the cranes.*** The festival is not bereft of cultural programs such as folk songs and dances, which are themed around dramas and songs by school children. The program starts by 9:30 am and lasts till late afternoon.

Druk Wangyel Tshechu, December – The Druk Wangyel Festival is an annual peg on the calendar on December 13th at the Druk Wangyal Lhakhang Festival Ground. ***This is located at Dochula Pass around 22km from the capital city Thimphu, and is easy to access. Held in one of the most scenic locations in the entire kingdom, it offers a stunning panoramic view of the Himalayan mountain range along with the cultural orientation to Bhutan.*** This was started in 2011 in commemoration of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and the Armed Forces' victory over Indian insurgent forces residing in southern Bhutan in 2003.

CROSSING CULTURES

FOUR WINTER FESTIVALS THAT YOU SHOULD NOT MISS IN BHUTAN

OFFBEAT IDEAS TO STEP INTO 2016



The Village Lodge, Paro
A secret hideaway in
the Himalayan foothills

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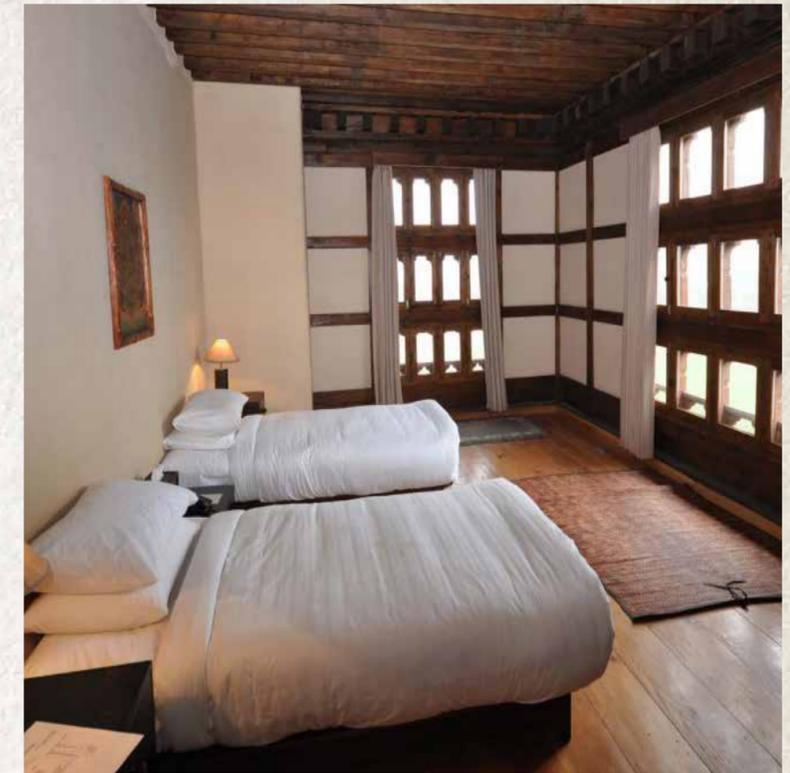
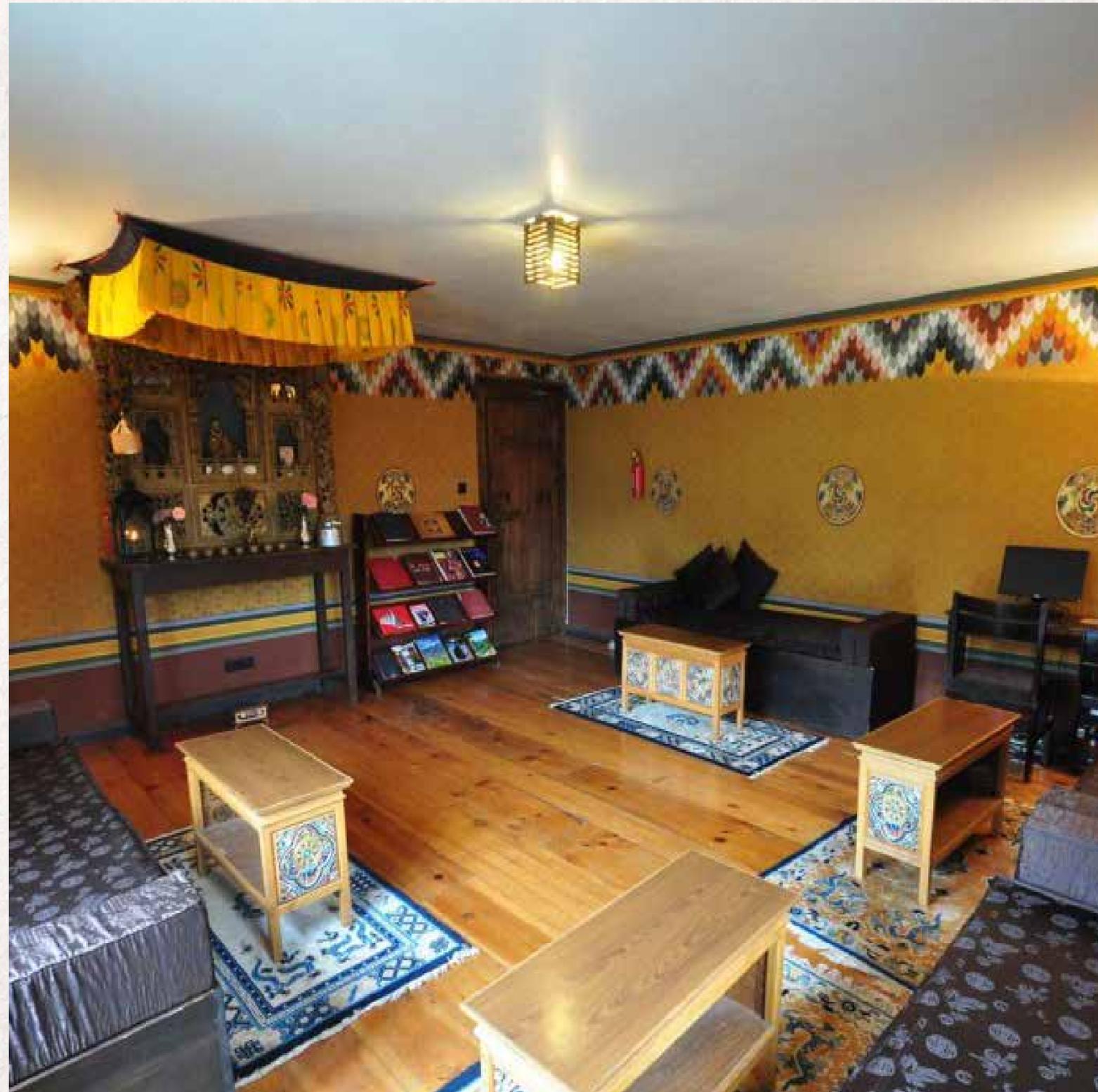


THE VILLAGE LODGE, PARO

Built with classic nuances of Bhutanese architecture, and inspired by the lifestyle of the locals, The Village Lodge offers a peek into life in Bhutan. Surrounded by densely forested hills, the lodge offers an exquisite traditional experience and comfortable accommodation in a serene Himalayan environment. Unmatched hospitality is just one of the few reasons why travellers love coming back here.

Highlights include:

- Inspiring local architecture and essence
- Excellent access from the capital city of Paro
- Limited number of rooms for personalized attention
- A well stocked bar (Never Underestimate the Spirit acronym NUTS)
- Easy access to the Tiger Nest monastery
- Food is focussed on local delicacy as well continental menu
- An array of leisure and recreation options
- Traditional hot stone bath available
- An overall immersive traditional experience



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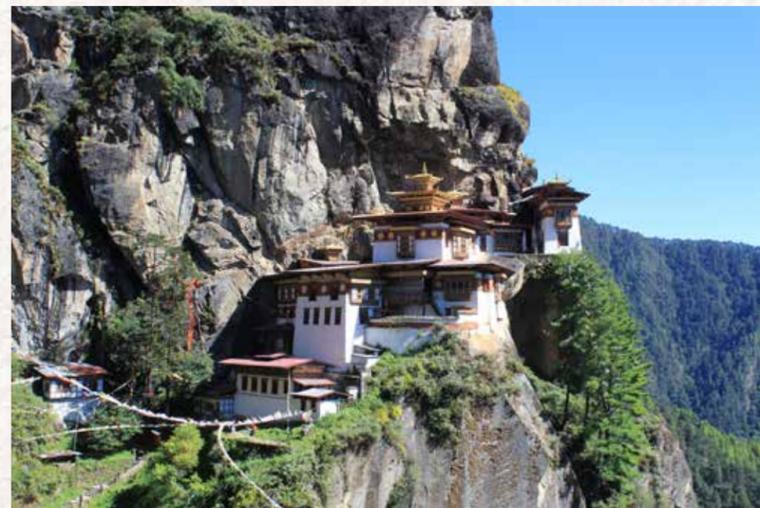
SUPRIYA SEHGAL

Footloose in Bhutan

Essential Things To Do In Bhutan

A Himalayan destination, with beguiling features, Bhutan is sure to transport you in a paradisiacal place. Dizzying hilltops, friendly locals, and monasteries tucked away on the sides of lofty cliffs and a peek into the vibrant masked dances and songs – Bhutan will stay imprinted in your memory forever. Even though the country is a small one, chances are that you will not be able to cover the entire length and breadth of it. So we've suggested five essential experiences that exemplify the country. You should know, that choosing these five was a challenge, as Bhutan offers a million hues that are worth your while. Bhutan is best known for its "Gross National Happiness". There is no doubt that you will return home with more cheer. Supriya, author and editor of Indo Asia Diaries, vouches for this..

Taksang Monastery – Better known as the Tiger's Nest monastery, this was built in 1692 at the site where Guru Rinpoche meditated in a cave in the 8th century. He is the founder of Mahayana Buddhism in Bhutan. *Legend says that Guru Rinpoche had flown on the back of a tiger from Khenpajong to this rock face and hence the name. Perched at the edge of a high cliffside at 3000m, this is difficult to climb, but an experience that one must not miss.* It was rebuilt in 1998 after it was destroyed in a fire.



Punakha Valley – Known as the rice bowl of the country with tiered rice fields grown in an organic way by employing traditional methods, the valley is a sprawling mass of green. *It is also home to the Chimi Lhakhang temple of fertility in Sopsakha village. It is not uncommon to find the image of a phallus on doors and walls of Bhutanese homes. Even here, women seek blessings for children there and are blessed by the lama with an ivory and wooden phallus.* The Punakha Valley is ideal for trekking enthusiasts, with the topography full of trails that are sure to enthrall.



Kurjey Lhakhang Monastery – Located in the Bumthang Valley, this monastery is a must on the itinerary for those who are looking for a serene spot. This is the final resting place for the first three kings of Bhutan. There is large tree behind the monastery, which is believed to be a hidden treasure that was left by the 8th-century Indian Buddhist master, Padmasambhava. The tranquil vibe of the monastery is the perfect addition to a hectic sightseeing schedule.

The Weekend Market, Thimphu- A great place to pick souvenirs and use the backdrop as a photo-opportunity, the weekend market of Thimphu is set up with stalls on both banks of the Wang Chhu, close to the Changlimithang Stadium. Vendors from all over the region start arriving on Thursday and Friday, and remain until Sunday night. *This is the ideal place to taste local delicacies like strips of fatty pork and balls of datse (homemade soft cheese). Incense and saffron are some of the other things, amongst thanka paintings that you may want to carry home.* Other souvenirs include wooden bowls, threaded beads, printing blocks, amulets, yak tails and prayer wheels.

Tower of Trongsa Royal Heritage Museum – If you are a history junkie, this is a place that should be on your itinerary. The watchtower (Ta Dzong) on a hill has been converted into an educative museum. *The five floors of the museum are dotted with Buddhist art and royal memorabilia, including treasures such as the 500-year-old jacket of Ngagi Wangchuk and football boots used by the teenaged fourth king.* The most sacred religious item is a copy of the Padma Kathang, a biography of Guru Rinpoche. Take your time to roam the floors and take in the rich history of the country.



TOP SPOT

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Hike in entry fee for key monuments



Though this may not be great news, but as tour operators, one must factor these developments in the costing. Effective from April 1st, 2016, the entry fee for 32 World Heritage Monuments in India has

been increased from Rs 250 to Rs 500 per head. For Indians and visitors from SAARC and BIMSTEC countries, as well as overseas citizens of India (OCI), the entry fees at world heritage monuments has been increased from Rs 10 to Rs 30 per head. Apart from the world heritage monuments, Indians, visitors from SAARC and BIMSTEC countries and OCI will be charged Rs 15 from the earlier rate of Rs 5, while other nationals will be charged Rs 200 from the previous fee of Rs 100. But there is some respite to this news. Additionally, for ticket holders of Rs 200, Rs 300, Rs 500 and Rs 750, separate queues will be provided to ensure smooth entry into the monument. For the Taj Mahal, foreign tourists will be Rs 1000, and ones of SAARC and BIMSTEC countries will be Rs 530.

Chandigarh opens its doors to Hyatt Regency

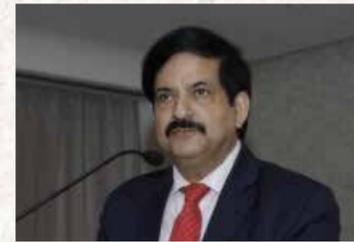


Chandigarh has a new address of luxury. Hyatt Regency has opened its door to the public from April 2, 2016, and is the first Hyatt-branded hotel to launch in the city. There are 211-rooms in the hotel and are available

at an opening offer starting from Rs 5,999 avg/night. The standard rates start from Rs. 8,500 while Bed & Breakfast starting Rs 9,000. The 36,000 sq ft (3,345 sq mtr) of flexible meeting and event facilities, including an 8,711 sq ft (809 sq mtr) pillar-less ballroom, is one of the highlights for business and other travellers to the city. Kurt Straub, Vice President – Operations, India Hyatt Hotels said in his address at the opening, “Hyatt Regency Chandigarh has been thoughtfully designed to make guests feel welcome, comfortable and relaxed, so that they can socialize, connect and celebrate any occasion. I am confident that this contemporary new hotel will add to the appeal of Le Corbusier’s charming city and introduce Hyatt’s well-known hospitality to guests and residents.” “We are delighted to bring this hotel to the heart of Chandigarh’s Tri-City,” added, Puneet Baijal, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Chandigarh. “Hyatt Regency Chandigarh is a modern hotel that embodies both the city’s design ethos and its residents’ desire for modern accommodations, excellent service and exciting places to eat and drink.”

India sets out to achieve 10% growth in tourism

Given that the country was able to witness a growth of 6.8 per cent in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) during January 2016, Vinod Zutshi, Secretary – Tourism, Govt. of India, is not over ambitious to expect inbound tourism to flourish



in 2016. “We are aiming at a 10 per cent growth in FTAs this year. February 2016 alone received a total of 1,17,210 tourists visiting India on e-Tourist Visa (eTV), recording a growth of 369.1 per cent month on month- the effects of eTV will be observed this year,” he said, commenting on the pattern. With the growth in footfalls in the country, there has also been a strong movement in upgrading hospitality facilities and sprucing up of public places. Much of the traffic can be attributed to the electronic visa that 150 countries can avail to enter India.

Amsterdam gets a taste of Jet Airways



Effective March 27, India’s premier international airline, Jet Airways will operate three daily non-stop flights from Amsterdam to Mumbai, Delhi and Toronto. Together with codeshare partners KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Delta Air Lines, Jet Airways will offer one stop codeshare access between India and 30 destinations across Europe and 11 destinations in the United States and Canada, making it easier for a number of nations to access India. Customers flying via Mumbai and Delhi will also be able to access Jet Airways’ network of 48 destinations within India as well as destinations in the Indian subcontinent and Asia. Naresh Goyal, Chairman of Jet Airways said, “Finally, we have arrived in the Netherlands. Today marks the start of our new service connecting three continents, together with our codeshare partners KLM and Delta Air Lines. We are thrilled to operate daily flights from Amsterdam to Mumbai, Delhi and Toronto and thereby facilitate trade and co-operation between India and the Netherlands”.

In the top, for the ‘Best Tourism Destination’ of Asia



India Tourism has been conferred with the 3rd position of the ‘Best Tourism Destination of Asia’ at ITB, Berlin. The award was collected by Vinod Zutshi,

Secretary, Ministry of Tourism along with the members of Indian team. This is an added gem in the repository of awards and accolades given to the country in the last decade. This also goes to show that from a vast expanse of Asian countries, India still holds the charm for millions of travellers. They entrust the country to offer them a wide variety of safe experiences across its vast region.

India Launches its first semi high speed train



Gatimaan Express, India Launches its first semi high speed train, was flagged off on April 5th, 2016. The train can touch the maximum speed of 160 kmph and

has a GPS-based passenger information system with sliding doors in the coaches. A live TV service is part of infotainment system. There is a focus on good food and service like the airlines, with a hostess on board. Both Indian and continental cuisine will be served. Equipped with a 5,400 HP electric locomotive, the train will have 12 coaches. Train timings allow clients to opt for a day return trip to Agra from Delhi. Gatimaan Express leaves Nizamuddin railway station at 8.10 am and reaches Agra Cantt. at 9.50 am. Return timings are 5.50 pm departure and 7.30 pm arrival.

MEET US AT



Indo Asia Tours is participating in the below mentioned upcoming roadshows in 2016. You can schedule an appointment at marketing@indoasiatours.com to meet us in person at these shows :

- **PATA & MOT Roadshow to USA/Canada:**
24 May-01 June, 2016
 - 25th May, 2016 (Wed)-Los Angeles (Orange County)
 - 26th May, 2016 (Thur)- Los Angeles (Beverly Hills)
 - 31st May, 2016 (Tue) -.Vancouver
 - 1st June, 2016 (Wed) - Seattle

IA SAYS



It was 1982, when I first went to the Kingdom of Bhutan – The Forbidden Kingdom . It has been only 8 years since the country had opened itself to tourism. ***The charm of a destination that was clearly untouched by western (or any other) civilization was present in every aspect of the country. It was delightful and refreshing.*** I have been visiting Bhutan ever since then and can vouch for it that not much has changed. It still feels like entering a mystical and magical land, that is so self-sustained and heavenly. ***This is one of the reasons why we think it is a great destination for travellers who like subtle, non – intrusive style of travelling, one that helps you mingle with the locals. We, at Indo Asia Tours, have just the itineraries for you.***

The trajectory of Bhutan’s tourism is something I’d like to share with you in this message, so you know exactly how delicate this destination is – and we would love to keep it like that.

When I first went here, the journey from Bagdogra (India) to Phunshiling (border town of Bhutan) used to take a full day and another good 12 hour ride through dirt tracks instead of a road to reach Paro. ***Restaurants and hotels were unknown to locals.*** I would like to draw you to the people of Bhutan, who are the true spokesmen for the ethos that the country imbibes. ***Local life is simple, steeped in peaceful Buddhism and has a calming effect on whoever steps in the country. People of Bhutan are always happy and welcome the tourist whole heartedly.***

It was in the late 80’s many grand monuments of Bhutan were rebuilt and huge conservation efforts were put to preserve national heritage. Druk Air started flying to Kolkata & Delhi and later extended it network to Kathmandu, Bangkok and Dhaka and others. Paro was the only airport in the beginning but now there domestic flights are also available within the country.

Today, travelling to and within Bhutan has become much easier and the country ranks amongst the top friendliest nation of the world. ***A journey to Bhutan is a journey of a lifetime to meet its friendly and happy people. It is a journey to visit nature at its best, and a journey to rediscover yourself.***

Sunirmol Ghosh

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH!



Shashank Singh | Asst. Manager

We, at Indo Asia Tours, stand for exemplary performance and attention to detail and that is exactly what Shashank embodies. One of the most trusted employees in our team, one can count on Shashank for his tireless effort to ensure that each trip is fine tuned with extreme care.