

Wander

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DESTINATIONS TO EXPLORE

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Wind down with a cup of *suja*, salted butter tea, at the Taj Tashi Thimphu hotel in Bhutan. It's a soothing finale to a day spent exploring the mystical capital (page 32).


1 Western Bhutan

by James Sturz



KINGDOM OF HAPPINESS

There's no mistaking Bhutan: Marijuana plants grow wild along the roads, prayer flags frame the Himalayas, and giant painted phalluses decorate the walls of buildings. The western region is the easiest to visit, and spring comes to life with colorful Buddhist *tsechus*, festivals known for elaborate dances and costumes (above).

"We loved the Haa Valley. The drive over Chelela pass is beautiful, and once we entered the valley, we were the only tourists there!"  Pam Reynolds, AFAR.com



OUTDOORS

For a one-night trek, climb to the **Thousand Fairies Camp**, 12,467 feet above the town of Paro. The next morning, descend to **Tiger's Nest**, the 17th-century monastery, left, built into the side of a cliff. The guru Rinpoche, who brought Buddhism to Bhutan, is said to have landed here on a flying tigress.

44/20-7193-5239,
guidesofbhutan.com

SPORTS

Bhutan's national sport is archery, and the country's preeminent range is in Thimphu, the capital. Watch archers shoot at targets 476 feet away, more than twice the Olympic distance. Teammates dance when the target is hit, cheerleaders trash-talk the competition, and astrologers pick out lucky players.

Changlimithang Archery Ground, Thimphu

FOOD

Chugo may look like a string of bones, but it's Bhutan's most popular snack. The only way to enjoy this rock-hard, smoked yak cheese is by soaking—or sucking on—each piece for an hour before eating it.

Pick up a strand of 20 at food stalls and markets throughout Bhutan for about \$4.

MARKET

Shop with locals at **Thimphu's Weekend Market**, where you can buy handwoven silks, singing bowls, and **traditional masks**, above. You'll also find human bones: Thigh bones, *kangdu*, are blown like trumpets, and skulls, *kapala*, are used to hold water or rice.

Across the Wang Chhu River from Chogyal Lam road. Open Saturdays and Sundays.



HOTEL

Como Hotels and Resorts will soon operate two retreats in Bhutan. **Uma Paro** has long been a favorite for its nine villas, each with butler service, a *bukhari* wood-burning stove, and a massage room. **Uma Punakha** will open later this year, with accommodations made of brick, timber, and glass that overlook rice paddies and the twisting Mo Chhu river.

Uma Paro villas from \$690. 975/8-271-597, uma.como.bz



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LYNSEY ADDARIO/IVI NETWORK/CORBIS; COURTESY OF COMO HOTELS AND RESORTS; DINODIAGAGE FOTOSTOCK; PHIL CHEATLE