



Fully Guided Slow Travel in the Himalayas
10 Days • Bhutan

SLOW JOURNEY THROUGH BHUTAN

Bhutan is a wonderful destination for culture and scenery and walking in the wilderness. Our slow-travel inspiration fits perfectly in the Himalayas. Explore the scenery and festivals that make this such a great country to visit.

WHY WE LOVE IT

Bhutan is the happiness capital of the world – and we want to show you why. "Goley Goley" is the local phrase for "Slowly Slowly". These words are always offered with kindness.

This is a Himalayan high slow-travel adventure full of comfortable hotels, cultural moments and plenty of time walking through some of Bhutan's most impressive landscapes. We'll be dining with the locals and spend time with monks as well.

The hardest walking section include the climb to Tiger's Nest Monastery (Taksang), walking through rhododendron forests and a sunrise view from the biggest chorten in Punakha Valley. We also get a chance to raft downstream past rice fields on a glacier fed river.

We have scheduled this trip to spend a day at one of Bhutan's famous cultural festivals – a celebration of their religion and lifestyle. This tour includes a visit to a special school for novice monks that our team and tours directly support.

ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS

Arrival in Paro & Thimphu

- Our team will collect you and the rest of the group at Paro Airport
- All meals are included during the tour
- Buddha Dordenma Forest Walk (2400m)
- Dochu La Gakidh Trail

Punakha

- Khamsum Yulley Sunrise Hike (1600m)
- Rafting the Mo Chu
- Monks at Punakha Dzong
- Chimi Lhakhang Village Walk

Phobjikha Valley

- Lawa La Descent into Phobjikha (3100m)
- Gangtey Valley Day Walk
- Crane Festival at Gangtey Gompa

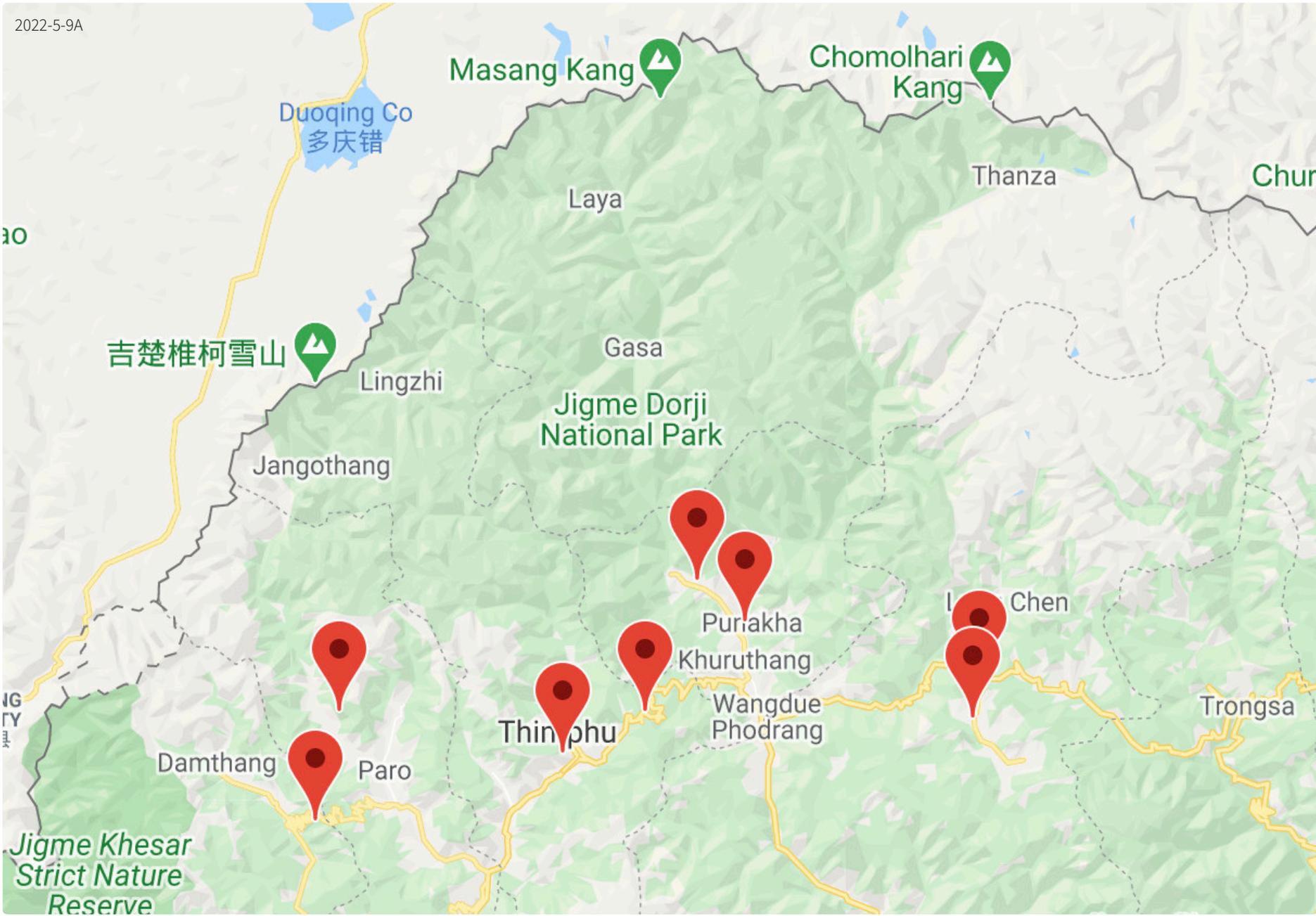
Paro Valley

- Travel day back to Paro
- Lunch at Eutok Gompa with the Novice Monks
- Blessing with the Monks
- Chele La and the Nunnery Walk (3400m)
- Tiger's Nest Day Hike (3100m)



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DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 • THIMPHU

Arrival

After our airport pick up, we start our adventure by meeting some of the monks. A short drive gets us into Thimphu where we have a light walk planned high above Thimphu Valley. We'll see the magnificent Buddha statue of Dordenma then take a walk downhill on hidden forest trails.

Thimphu is our best chance for essential supplies, or pick up a local sim card or meet some local artists. It's a great introduction to Bhutanese culture and we have a special family in town to prepare a very personal taste of Himalayan cuisine.

Day 2 • PUNAKHA

We drive to the sub-tropical valley of Punakha (1,300m) via the high mountain pass of Dochua La at 3,000m. On the far side of Dochu La we follow the rice fields mountain streams on foot. This trail is called Gakidh, which means Happiness - exactly what we have come to Bhutan to enjoy.

This trail was once the main route between Thimphu and Trongsa, before roads were built in the 1970s. The trail has stood the test of time and is also used by the central monastic body during the annual migration from Thimphu to Punakha in the winter.

The trail begins at Thinleygang and descends into the villages of Toeb Chandana before the gradual ascent towards the finish point in Punakha. The highlights besides the spectacular surrounds are the villages along the trail. Each village has its own unique culture, artistic skills and trade practices.

Day 3 • PUNAKHA

We start today with an early sunrise walk in a secluded valley. We will be alone with the dawn light from high above the northern reaches of Punakha Valley, at a stunning temple called Khamsum Yulley.

Khamsum Yulley is located in north Punakha, it only takes 20 minutes to drive to the trail head from our accommodation. This is an easy walk, taking about an hour for the ascent. The Khamsum Yulley Temple offers amazing views of the farmlands to the south and parts of the Bhutanese Himalayas to the north. When we return to the valley floor we'll have a rafting team ready to take us gently downstream for great views as we paddle past Punakha Dzong.

Day 4 • PHOBJIKHA

Our walk to Chimi Lhakhang (Temple of the Divine Madman) takes about one hour. This is an easy and interesting walk as the path runs through a village, agricultural lands and souvenir shops all dealing with phallic objects and art.

We then leave Punakha Valley and the road takes us high into the Rhododendron forests of the Himalayas with stunning views of the surrounding peaks, and glimpses of Tibet. We leave the highway and begin our slow walk downhill from Lawa La, a small mountain pass where yak herders winter their animals. From there we continue in the winter light down to the township of Gangtey and visit the beautiful monastery that overlooks the valley. The chances of coming across yaks and variety of birds is also quite high along the route.

Depending on the availability of time and interest of the group members, the walk can also be extended by an hour along the nature trail, an easy walk no ascents, that runs along the roosting grounds of the endangered black necked cranes known as Phobjikha that winter in the valley.

We hope to hear them around the valley during our stay and see them foraging in the potato fields.



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Day 5 • PHOBJIKHA

Festival Day

Today is our festival day, and we have a unique event to attend. We take it slow and enjoy a day of cultural activities, shoulder to shoulder with the locals. The Monastery at Gangtey will be in full swing for a spiritual celebration of the Black-Necked Cranes. Monks will perform sacred dances (chams) and blessing will take place with locals at the end of the day. The experience is a cultural immersion and will reveal a deep insight into the harmony between Bhutanese culture and Himalayan nature.

Day 6 • PHOBJIKHA

We offer a longer walk today that starts at the Gangtey end of the valley in Yuesa village and ends in the village of Kilorthang. The trail ranges from open fields to wooden forest, and follows the edge of Phobjikha Valley. We may meet some of the local potato farmers along the way and have a cup of yak butter tea. All along the way we'll listen for the hooting of cranes.

Day 7 • PARO

Travel Day

Today we have a long drive to return to Paro Valley (2,200m), with a stop on the way to sample the local food. Once back in Paro we have a great hotel for the remaining few days with stunning views of the rice fields and Paro Dzong. We have a cultural program lined up for the afternoon and some light walking to follow the traditional trade route that ran across a lovely old wooden bridge.

Day 8 • PARO

We head out of Paro to the ridge line at Chele La, a high mountain pass from where we begin a walk through the Rhododendron Forest. Our hike heads past the Kila Nunnery before continuing out of the high ranges and down to a lower altitude.

Most of the path is flat or gently downhill, traversing forests of giant Rhododendron trees and pristine habitats that have more wildlife than people. We also get some views of Jomolhari, the highest peak in Bhutan which rises to 7,300m.

We have a special picnic lunch planned for this walk, but will be back in Paro for a late afternoon coffee and a chance to grab souvenirs.

Day 9 • PARO

This is the most difficult hike of the trip. The Tigers Nest monastery is located at an elevation of 2,950m and sits 800m high above the Paro valley floor. This hike is an uphill climb most of the way with a tea-room stop about half-way up.

What makes it difficult is the altitude and the extra twist at the end when you finally reach the lookout at Tigers Nest. It's a lot of steps. At this vantage point the temple is just across the ravine, but you have to descend stairs and then climb back up again to reach the entrance (an additional hour of stairs).

There's also an option to continue higher up the mountain and enjoy views looking down onto Tigers Nest as well. Our tour itinerary is designed to get you adjusted to the altitude so you will be in good shape to tackle the Tigers Nest with minimal effects of altitude. It's a challenge but very achievable.

The Tigers Nest monastery is synonymous with Bhutan and is also the most celebrated cultural landmark here in Bhutan. This is also one of the most holiest of places associated with Guru Rinpoche, the patron saint of Bhutan.

For those passing on Tiger's Nest, we'll also offer a lunch visit to a local monastery and a chance to meet their novice monks.

Day 10

Transfer day

We depart Paro with the option to fly home via Bangkok or Kathmandu.



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TOUR INCLUSIONS

- Bhutan visa processing/visa fees
- Accommodation at 3 star hotels on twin sharing basis (single supplement available at additional cost at time of booking)
- Airport transfers in Bhutan
- Government mandated sustainable development contribution (USD\$65/night/person)
- All meals (lunch, dinner and breakfast)
- Services of an experienced professional licensed tour/hiking/trekking guides
- Host from Be Your Best in addition to local guides
- Transport throughout the stay in Bhutan, sightseeing activities, museum/monument fees, road/monument permits
- Packaged drinking water throughout the stay in Bhutan and other services wherever possible.

ACCOMMODATION

Bhutanese hotel standards are very good and the 3-star hotels we use are ones we visit every year and have had great experiences with. All rooms are clean and of a standard you would expect for international travellers, with private ensuite and daily servicing.

You can expect to have access to electricity every night and a chance to recharge camera batteries, phones and ipads, plus access to complimentary wifi. Hotels are well heated and hot showers are a standard amenity at any time of year.

MEALS

There was a time when Bhutan was infamous for “tourist food”, which was bland and uninspiring, in a misguided attempt to protect travellers from the spicy chillies that locals enjoy so much. We’ve been running trips to Bhutan for over a decade and our guides understand that our travellers really enjoy connecting with the local food, particularly a really good curry or a plate of Himalayan dumplings (momos).

Many meals will be served at the hotels we stay at, but sometimes we make special arrangements to enjoy local eats that are especially tasty or culturally interesting. Usually both. There will typically be a range of options at each meal during this trip, but if you have special dietary requirement or allergies please let us know in advance.



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WEATHER

We schedule our Bhutan slow travel adventure for the month of November, to coincide with the crane festival in Gangtey Gumpa. This is early winter in the Himalayas, which means the temperature overnight gets very cold. It's also the dry season, so you can expect a decent amount of sunshine. Snow fall is very unusual in Bhutan, but can happen.

When out in the sun you will often be warm enough to wear only pants and a shirt. Long sleeves are also recommended when visiting temples, as a signal of respect. A detailed packing list provided to our travellers in advance of the tour.

FLIGHTS

The itinerary starts with a Be Your Best host collecting you from the Bhutan's Paro airport on Day 1 and heading out on tour from the airport pick up. Please talk with us to help you choose a flight that arrives with the rest of the group into Paro airport. Coming from Australia a flight via Bangkok is the best option. Bhutan's national carrier, Druk Air, and Bhutan Airlines both provide flights via Kathmandu and Bangkok. Upgrading to business class on these sectors is very modest in price and can make your transit through Bangkok Airport a little easier.

SIM CARD

For those who need to be contactable at all times, it's easy for us to arrange a local SIM card for your time in Bhutan. This must be done while in Thimphu and costs less than US\$25 inclusive of several gigabytes of 4G data. Just make sure you bring an unlocked phone if planning to use a local card. International roaming can be hit and miss.

TIPPING

Tips for local trekking guides, driver are included in tour price so tipping is not necessary.

FOR THE KIDS

Did you know Bhutan has a special system for western travellers that allocates a portion of your daily travel budget to an government fund that covers the cost of education for Bhutanese children. Every day you stay in Bhutan you are helping advance schooling for local kids.

TRAVEL IN BHUTAN

All travellers visiting Bhutan must book through a registered tour operator in Bhutan or its international agent – that's us! Each Bhutanese registered tour operator is monitored by the Tourism Council of Bhutan to ensure they meet stringent requirements and provide guests with high quality service. We've been working with our team in Bhutan for over a decade now and we know they will do their very best to make your visit to Bhutan the best it can be.



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SLOWLY SLOWLY

“Goley Goley” is the Bhutanese expression for “Slowly Slowly”. These words are offered with kindness to wish people a good journey.

Our slow journey through Bhutan is a blend of outdoor enjoyment, remote wilderness and cultural immersion. We make time for attending a festival in Gangtey and meeting monks in temples. It's a gentle journey that allows time to soak in the culture and enjoy the Himalayas.

Our guides, Rinzi and Lhaba, are accustomed to spending weeks traversing the Snowman Trek and some lesser known challenges, but they too are human and the entire team really enjoys the less demanding tour designs with Be Your Best.

One of the reasons Bhutan is the happiest place on earth is because they take life at a sensible pace. They don't try to do too much. We have a similar philosophy for our tour designs. A gentle pace means a better tour experience, and a chance to fully appreciate what a sensational and inspiring destination Bhutan is.

Most of the walks on this trip are short. Except for Tigers Nest there are no full day hikes or the need to carry a pack lunch. We take care of all catering, be it a special picnic while we're on the road, or stopping into a restaurant that has been hand picked by the tour host. Lunch stops are also an

opportunity to make a cultural connection, and we like to share all the best highlights of Bhutanese food during the course of a trip.

The toughest hike in this itinerary will be Tigers Nest. Not only does the hike rise nearly a kilometre in elevation from the trail head, but the final section is a dip back down into a ravine before ascending stairs into the temple itself. We have all day for the hike if we need it, there's no rush.

For many of us the walk back down from Tigers Nest can be more demanding than the climb to the top. It's tough on the knees especially. If you are susceptible to knee trouble then hiking poles for this section are advised. Slower you go the better.

We also have plenty of help on hand for every walk. Two local guides plus a host from Be Your Best will be present whenever we hit the trails. We have a large team to make it easier for everyone to walk at their own pace instead of feeling rushed.

Before we reach Tigers Nest you'll have lots of opportunity to warm up for the climb. The itinerary starts easy and builds in difficulty over the journey, along with acclimating to the elevation. The itinerary is very achievable and immensely enjoyable.



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IS ALTITUDE A PROBLEM?

Absolutely not!

But it's always wise to ask first. We've been running trips in the Himalayas for over a decade now and we understand why many people are worried about the elevations.

This itinerary avoids any seriously tough elevations, and we take it slowly on the journey so your body can adjust to the conditions. By the time we tackle the Tigers Nest you will be very well acclimated and ready to give it your best.

There are times during this trip when you will feel a little breathless, and some the high passes we travel through are in excess of 3,300m, but we have never had a guest suffer from "altitude sickness" on our Bhutan or Nepal adventures.

We'll do our best to help you keep hydrated and to stay within your limits. If you are taking medication for a heart condition, a lung condition or post-covid complications we ask that you consult with your doctor for advice on altitude and your condition.

COVID ASSURANCE

Due to the ongoing potential for Covid-19 to impact future travel plans, we are offering an assurance that in the event of our tour departure being cancelled due to border closures, you will be given the option to move to another date in future at no extra cost.

To secure your place on any scheduled departure a deposit is required. Travel Insurance remains essential for participation on our trips. It is essential to include covid-coverage with your insurance.

If you need assistance in organising suitable coverage for your travels, please get in touch so we can help.



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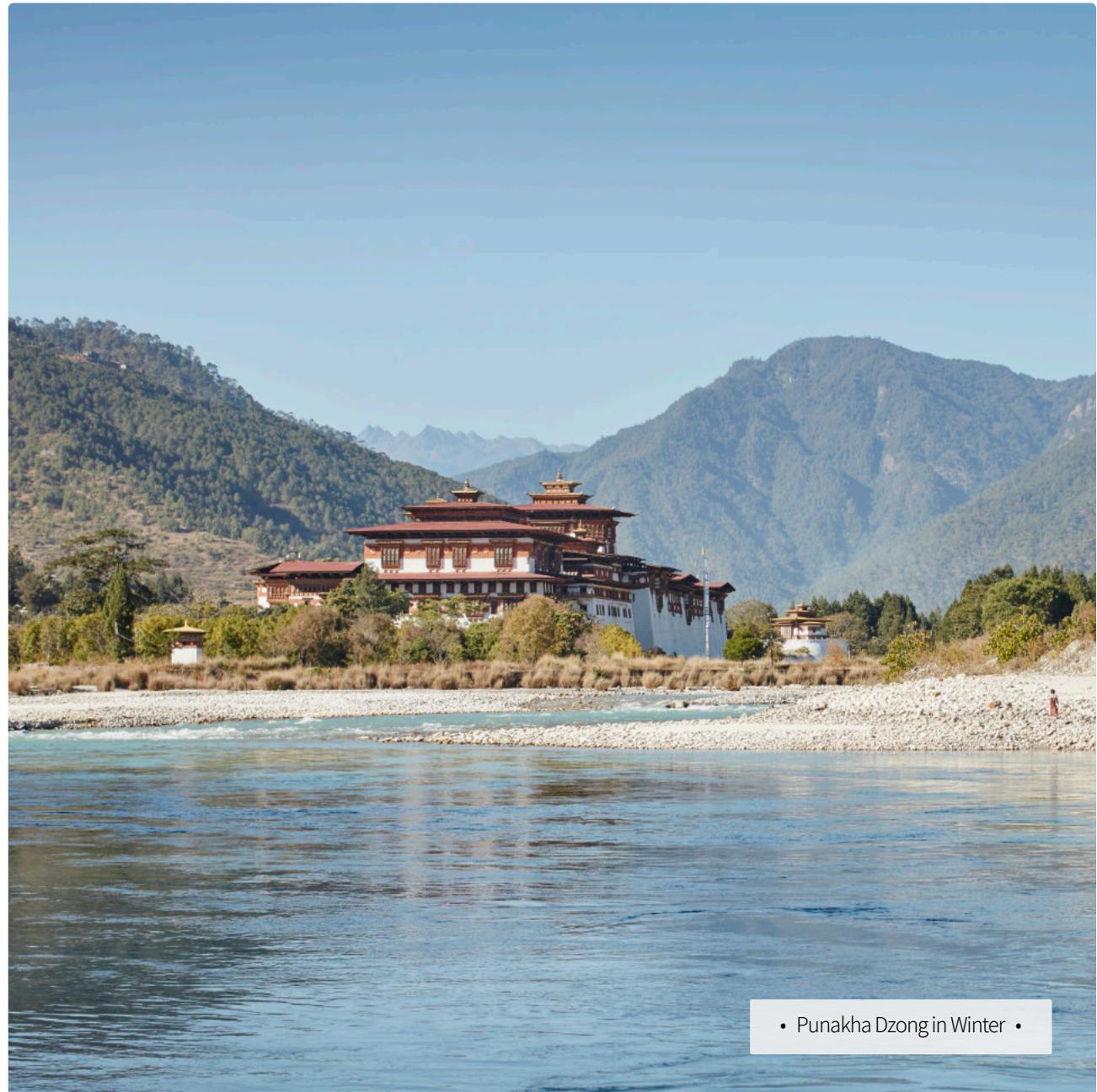
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• Punakha Dzong in Winter •