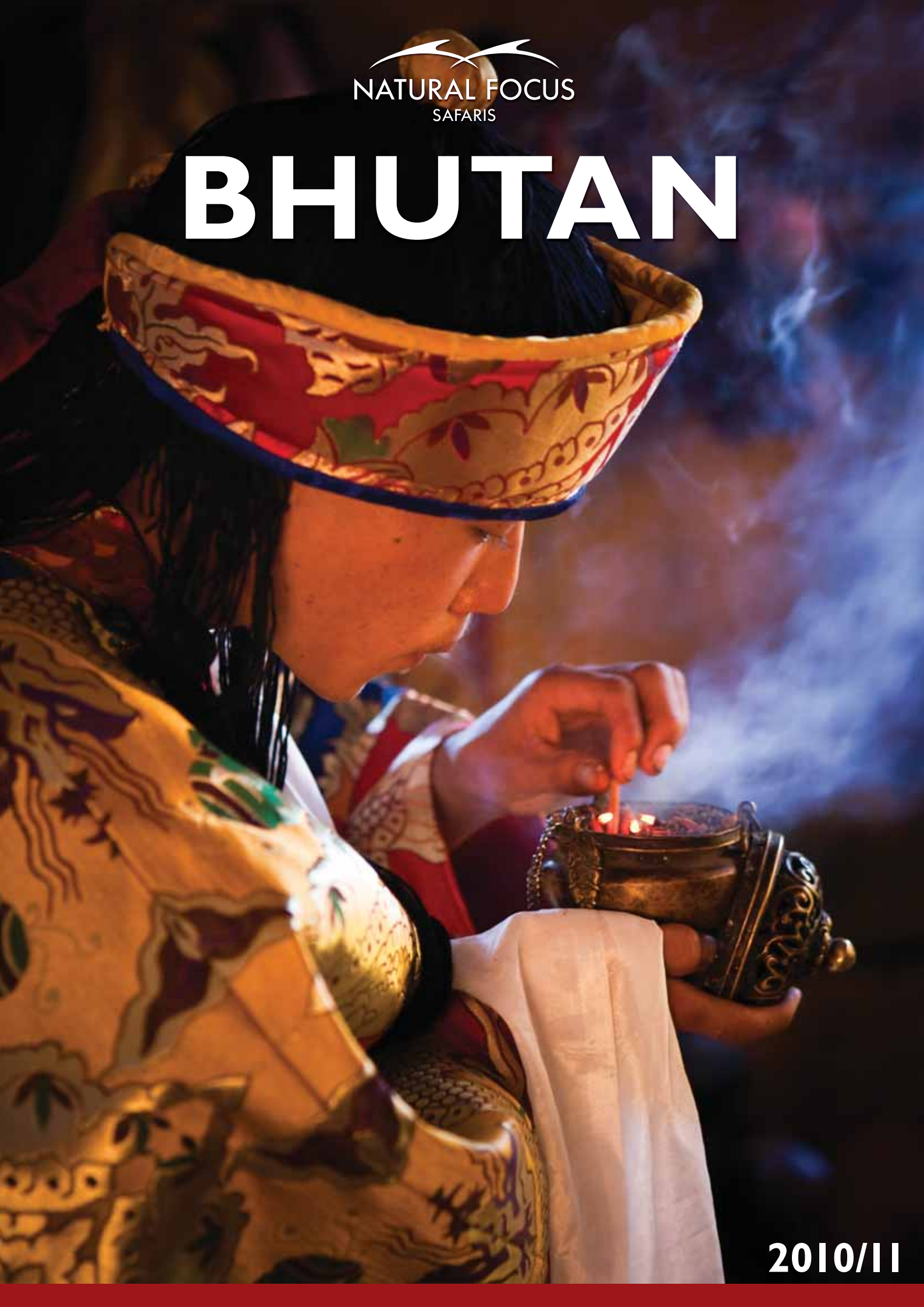




NATURAL FOCUS
SAFARIS

BHUTAN



2010/11

BHUTAN BECKONS

Located high amongst the mighty Himalayan range, the hidden Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan is a destination that even the most seasoned traveller considers a privilege to visit.

Having only opened its doors to tourism in 1974, it has remained relatively isolated from western influence enabling it to maintain its strong Buddhist heritage. It permeates every aspect of society from the red-robed monks performing sacred ceremonies in the monasteries, to the old men and women bent over their prayer wheels chanting mantras. Prayer flags flutter across mountains and rivers, and chortens stand at every corner. The people of Bhutan are friendly and united by their genuine spiritual belief. The awe-inspiring landscapes of snow-clad mountains, lush valleys, dense forests and rushing streams are considered to be the abodes of the gods by the nation's people. Festivals (Tsechus) are an important part of life and are held throughout the year.

This unique destination has so much to offer, with tours ranging from an 8 day 'glimpse' to a 15 day journey across the country. All itineraries are flexible and can be easily tailored. Tours are accompanied by a driver and local English speaking guide, and you have the choice of staying in standard hotels and guesthouses or a range of boutique resorts. Roads can be steep and winding, making a journey of 100km a morning's adventure. We recommend that travellers on our Bhutan tours have a relaxed attitude and a sense of adventure to get the most out of their journey.

We look forward to sharing with you this fascinating part of the world.

Stephen and Sara Cameron – Founders



BHUTAN TRAVEL BUREAU

Travellers to Bhutan are permitted entry only with a government endorsed tour operator. Bhutan Travel Bureau, our chosen ground operator in Bhutan, was established in 1991 and is one of the most experienced tour companies in Bhutan. They are renowned for their personalised VIP service, and pride themselves on their professionalism, using a team of seasoned guides and drivers, a contemporary vehicle fleet, and carefully government approved hotels.



TOURIST TARIFF

Bhutan's tourism policy is based on a concept of "High Value & Low Impact". For this reason the number of tourists visiting Bhutan are kept to a socially and environmentally manageable level through a government regulated tourist tariff. This policy stipulates an all inclusive rate for foreigners for each night in Bhutan that covers all food, accommodation (excluding category A resorts), transport and guide services. A portion of the fee also goes to the government to sustain the provision of free medical care and education. All tourists travelling to Bhutan are subject to this tariff helping to make it a special destination for those discerning travellers looking for a unique experience.

WHEN TO GO

Even though Bhutan is a year-round destination, the most popular times to visit are during spring (March-May) and autumn (September-November). The weather is milder and many of the large festivals take place during these seasons. Spring can be cloudier and have more rain than autumn, but the wildlife and flowers are at their most vivid. Winter (December-February) can be very cold, however the skies are usually clear providing good photographic opportunities and you can experience Bhutan with fewer tourists around. The summer monsoon season (mid June-August) is not highly recommended for travel to Bhutan with high temperatures and a significant chance of rainfall.

Traditional Tsechu dancer



Cover: © Gavin Gough: www.gavingough.com



© Uma Paro

Uma Paro

ACCOMMODATION

With a number of international hotel companies now operating in Bhutan there is a wide choice of accommodation to choose from - from the humble yak herder's residence or cosy Bhutanese guesthouse to a family run hotel or luxurious resort style lodge. Together with our operator, we have carefully selected government approved accommodations with the best location, service, ambience and cuisine. Our standard range of hotels and guesthouses (listed as Category B) are clean, comfortable, simply furnished and generally rated tourist class. For those travellers who prefer to experience Bhutan in luxury we offer a boutique range of luxurious lodges and resorts including spa and yoga facilities (listed as Category A). We can mix and match your accommodation to suit your itinerary and complement your style of travel. It is important to note that during festival time hotels/lodges are in high demand and can be difficult to secure.

CATEGORY A: BOUTIQUE RANGE

Taj Tashi, Thimphu

Taj Tashi features 66 luxury rooms and 9 suites with dramatic hand-painted walls and majestic mountain views. Reflecting the charm and sensibilities of Bhutan's rich heritage, the hotel maintains a delicate balance of traditional Bhutanese design with contemporary elegance. Inside, guests will find every modern comfort including a spa, swimming pool, conference facilities and multi-cuisine dining.

Uma Paro Resort

Located on a serene, tree-clad hill overlooking Paro, this luxury resorts features 29 beautifully appointed rooms and suites including 8 one-bedroom villas with private spa and courtyard. All rooms feature rich furnishings reflecting Bhutan's heritage. Other facilities include the Como Shambhala Retreat offering a range of holistic therapies such as Ayurveda, massage and facials, hot stone bath house, gym and indoor pool.

Amankora Luxury Lodges

These small, luxurious 5 star lodges are located throughout Bhutan's western and central valleys. Wood-panelled guest suites feature a combined lounge and bedroom furnished with a king-size bed and a traditional bukhari (wood-burning stove). Lodge amenities include spa/steam rooms and a yoga/mediation room.



© Uma Paro

Uma Paro Villa



© Taj Tashi

Deluxe Room, Taj Tashi, Thimphu



© Taj Tashi

Taj Tashi Hotel, Thimphu



© Amankora

Amankora Resort Suite, Bumthang

CATEGORY B: STANDARD RANGE

Comfortable hotels and guesthouses built in traditional architectural style are available in all major Bhutanese towns. Travellers should be aware that the standard range of accommodation is generally rated tourist class, and are simple, charming and hospitable.

Guests can expect rooms combining traditional Bhutanese style with features such as hot and cold running water, electricity, heating, telephones, and in major townships, television. Western and central towns such as Thimphu, Paro, Punakha, Wangduephodrang and Bumthang have good standard hotels whilst accommodation in the east in areas such as Mongar and Trashigang is more rudimentary but clean, comfortable and infused with warm Bhutanese hospitality. Many hotels and lodges are family-owned and run, and provide you with an intimate experience of local culture.

Generally, hotels feature restaurants providing traditional Bhutanese cuisine tempered for western tastes. In Paro and Thimphu, there is usually also western and Indian cuisine on offer. Meals are usually served buffet style.



© David Kneale

Dewachen Hotel, Phobjikha Valley



© Gangtey Palace

Gangtey Palace Hotel, Paro



© Stephen Cameron

Cottage Room, Olathang Hotel, Paro



© Bhutan Suites

Bhutan Suites standard room, Thimphu

LOCATION HIGHLIGHTS

Bhutan's spectacular scenery forms a backdrop to every town, village and lonely monastery that dots the landscape. The population is mainly concentrated in the towns and villages and it is in these fascinating places that you can really discover the spirit of the Bhutanese people.

PARO

Paro (2,250m), the site of Bhutan's only airport, is set amongst the pastoral beauty of Paro Valley. Well worth visiting is Ta Dzong, the National Museum housed in an ancient watchtower and featuring a fascinating collection of art, relics, religious thangka paintings and Bhutan's exquisite postage stamps. Nearby sights include the incredible monastery of Taktsang which clings to a sheer rock cliff, the ruins of Drukgyel Dzong (fortress of the victorious Drukpas) with its magnificent views of Mount Jumolhari and the 7th century Kyichu Temple.



The National Memorial Chorten, Thimphu

THIMPHU

Bhutan's capital city of Thimphu (2,350m) is a fascinating blend of the old and the new. Zoning regulations have retained the forms and motifs of Bhutan's traditional architecture giving the city a wonderful structural harmony. The capital's most striking visual landmark is the magnificent Tashichhodzong, the seat of the Royal Government and Central Monastic Body. Semtokha Dzong, 6km from the city limits, is the kingdom's oldest Dzong and now used as the Dzongkha language school of Bhutan.

A number of institutions in Thimphu such as the Royal School of the Performing Arts, the School of Traditional Painting and the Institute of Traditional Medicine offer visitors an insight into Bhutanese culture. Other attractions include the National Memorial Chorten, the Handicrafts Emporium, National Library (housing a rare collection of Buddhist scriptures) and the lively weekend market.



© Taj Tashi

Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest), Paro

PHUENTSHOLING

The bustling frontier trading town of Phuentsholing in the south is the gateway to Bhutan for overland travellers from India and Sikkim. From Phuentsholing, the road winds north over the southern foothills, through lush forested valleys and around the rugged north-south ridges of the inner Himalayas to the western valleys of Thimphu and Paro.



© Bhutan Travel Bureau

Langur Monkey enroute to Punakha

PUNAKHA

Punakha (1,310m) is Bhutan's ancient capital, and remains the winter seat of the Central Monastic Body due to its sub-tropical climate. The Punakha Dzong, built in 1637 by the Shabdrung (the unifier of Bhutan), is situated on a triangular spit of land at the confluence of the Mo Chu and Pho Chu rivers. The body of the Shabdrung, who died in 1651 while in meditation at Punakha, is preserved at the Dzong. Other highlights includes the incredible views from Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten and Chimi Lhakhang, dedicated to Bhutan's popular saint Drukpa Kuenley, otherwise known as the "divine madman" due to his unorthodox methods of religious teaching.

WANGDUEPHODRANG

Wangduephodrang (1,800m) or Wangdue, as it is more familiarly known is a bustling market town. The formidable Dzong is the town's most visible feature sitting on the top of a hill overlooking the junction of two rivers. In the 17th century Wangdue played a critical role in unifying western, central and southern Bhutan.

GANGTEY/ PHOBJIKHA

Phobjikha Valley (2,900m) is often described as "the most beautiful valley in the most beautiful country in the Himalayas". Every winter, the rare and beautiful Black-necked Cranes return from Tibet to the safety of this quiet and remote valley. Gangtey, located a few kilometres above the valley has a very interesting 17th century Nyingmapa monastery, the only one of its kind west of the Black Mountain range.



© David Kneale

Prayer wheels, 15th century Changangkha Temple, Thimphu



© David Kneale

Beautiful Bumthang Valley

TRONGSA

Ancestral home of Bhutan’s ruling dynasty, Trongsa is a strategically located town on the east-west route. Trongsa Dzong, built on a spur with a spectacular views of the Mangde River Valley is Bhutan’s most impressive fortress.



© Bhutan TCB

Black-necked Cranes in flight

BUMTHANG

Bumthang is the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, distinguished in history as the first place Buddhism was introduced to Bhutan by Guru Rimpoche. Its undulating green valleys are renowned for their natural beauty, historic palaces and numerous temples. Some of these include Kurje Lhakhang, home to a rock featuring the imprint of Guru Rimpoche’s body, Jambay Lhakhang (7th century) and the Tamshing Monastery containing some of the oldest wall paintings in Bhutan.

TRASHIGANG

Trashigang (3,773m) is the largest urban centre in eastern Bhutan. It is known for its woodwork and fine weaving. Trashigang Dzong commands a spectacular view over the valley and the Gong River below. In winter, semi-nomadic people from the north-eastern glacial valleys of Merak and Sakteng, dressed in their characteristic burgundy jackets, come here to sell their cheese, butter and yak wool.

SAMDRUP JONGKHAR

Located in the scenic south-east of Bhutan, the border town of Samdrup Jongkhar is the eastern overland gateway to Bhutan. From here you can reach the nearest airport at Guwahati in the Indian state of Assam, from where you can fly to Delhi or Kolkata.



© David Kneale

Monastery wall painting

FLEXIBLE, INDEPENDENT, TAILOR MADE TOURS

We understand that every traveller is different, so we like to provide a broad range of travel options to suit you. All of the suggested itineraries featured in this brochure are totally flexible, and can be easily tailored to suit your specific interests and budget. They are also totally independent ensuring your trip to Bhutan is an entirely personalised and unique experience.



© David Kneale

School children in traditional dress