

TRAVEL ANDFOOD

DESTINATIONS P5
TIPS AND ADVICE P7
MY TRAVELS P8-9
RESTAURANT REVIEW P11
WINES P15



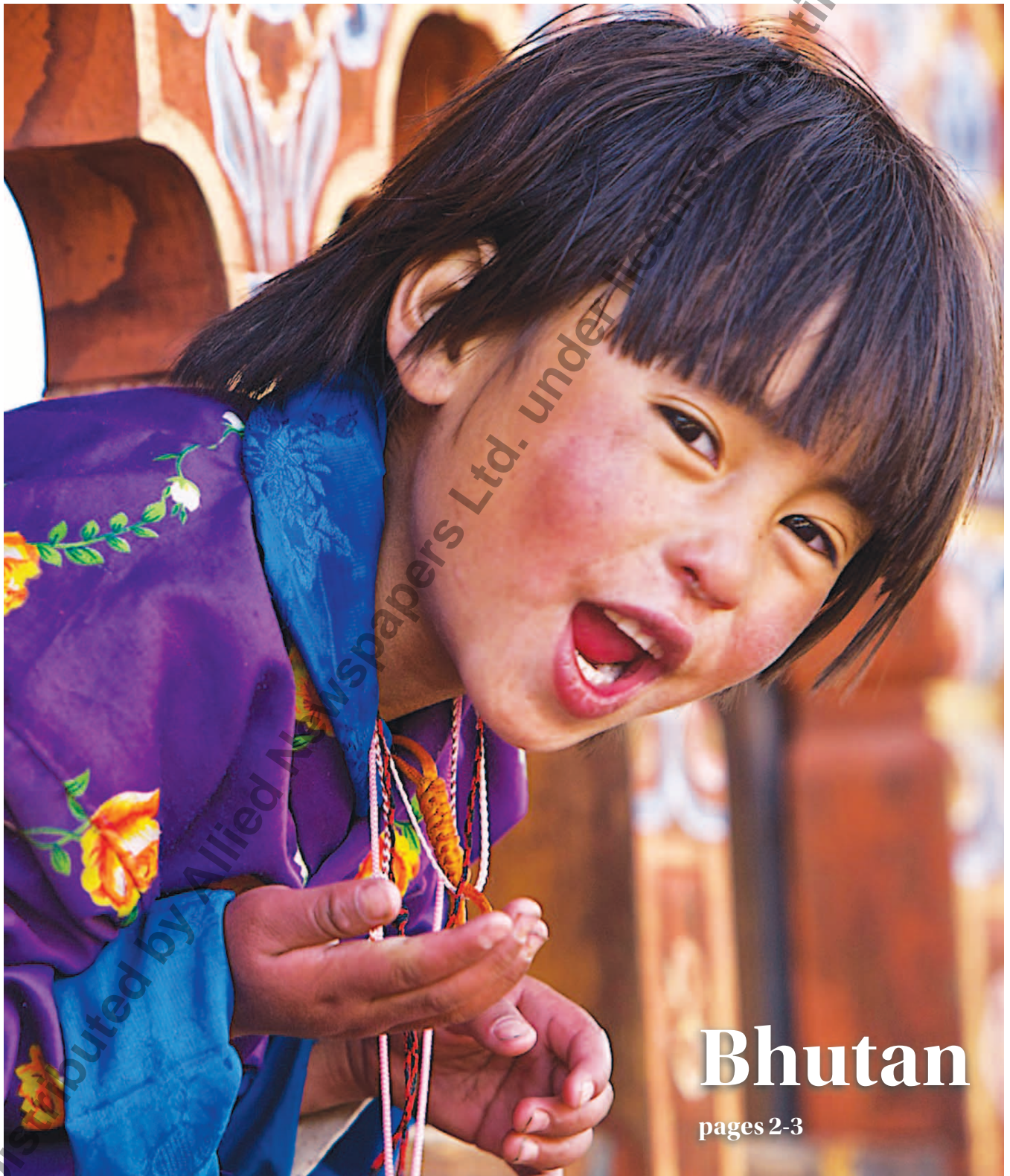
HILTON RECIPES
WIN A DINNER
FOR TWO
» PAGE 13



IBIZA
THE CLUBBING CAPITAL
IS CHANGING
» PAGE 16



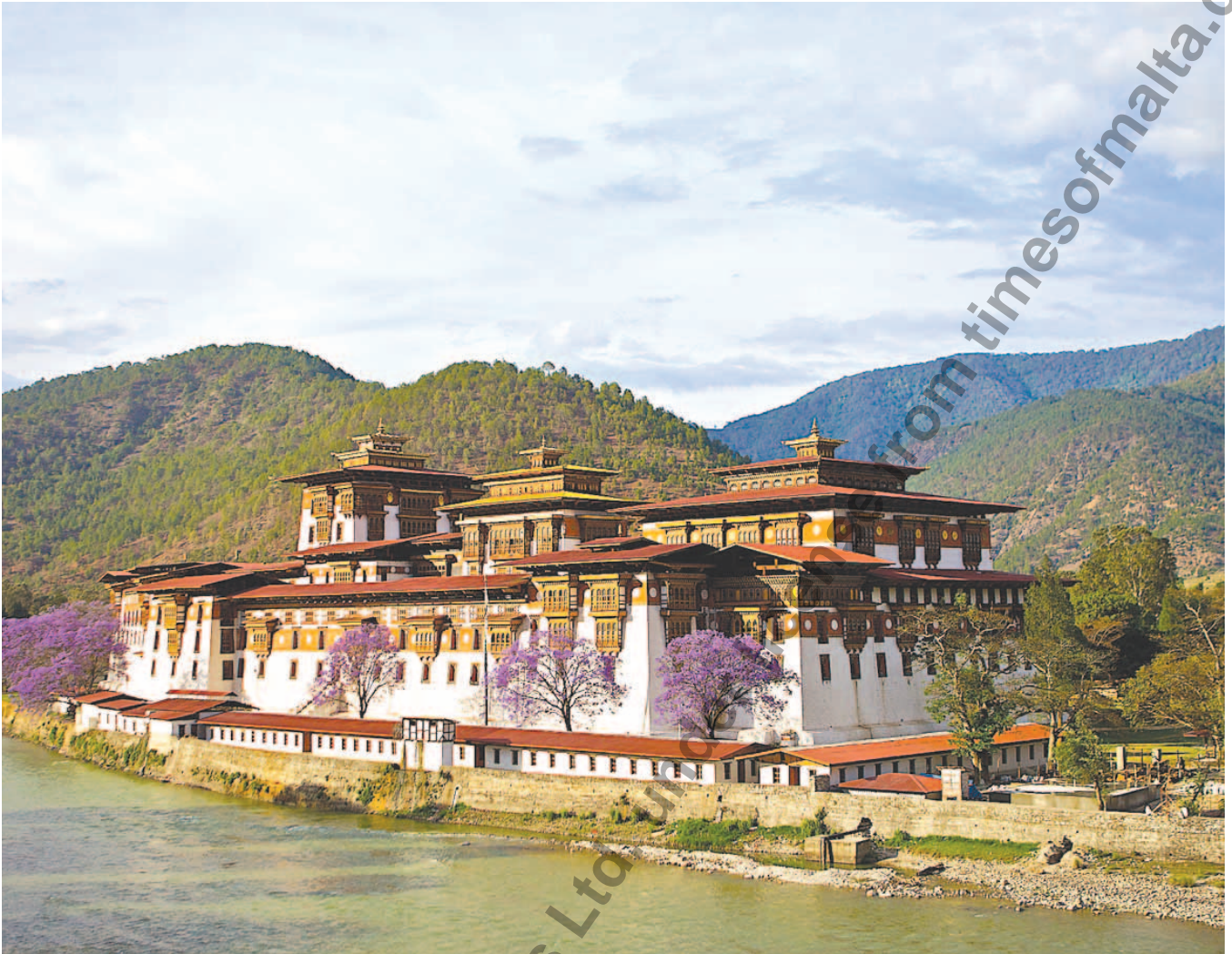
EVENTS
ONE LOVE
FESTIVAL
» PAGE 4



Bhutan

pages 2-3

Bhutan



Known in ancient times as the palace of great happiness, Punakha Dzong is the second Dzong to be built in Bhutan and one of the most beautiful ones. Today it is the winter home for the clergy. *Photos: Paul Zammit Cutajar*



A footbridge in Thimphu adorned with colourful prayer flags.

The enchanted kingdom

Paul Zammit Cutajar

Most countries around the world measure their economy's performance by their gross domestic product. While the world's economists and politicians scratch their heads poring over facts and figures, there is a small kingdom, nestled in the Himalayas, which has a different take on their economy.

"We have gross domestic happiness," is something you hear from people of all walks of life. It is not just a cool-sounding phrase; it is real. The Bhutanese people are proud of it and live by it.

The term was coined by the fourth King of Bhutan. His idea

was that traditions and the environment should not be sacrificed in the ruthless pursuit of economic growth.

Bhutan is a magical land of legend, myth and mystical belief that

"Travelling in a comfortable SUV definitely beats the 'Vomit Comet'"

takes you back some 400 years. It is the last surviving Buddhist Himalayan Kingdom. With such a deep religious culture, it is almost impossible to leave Bhutan without acquiring a real spiritual experience.

Bhutan

Colourful festivals are held, mainly in the springtime. Archery competitions take place almost every week. It is truly a photographer's paradise.

There is always a smile to greet you and a genuine openheartedness and amicability that will last well beyond your stay.

It is only last year that Bhutan became the youngest democracy in the world. And in the same year, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck became the fifth King of Bhutan and the youngest reigning monarch in the world.

The 28-year-old bachelor was educated in the US and then at Oxford University, England, where he gained a wealth of knowledge that proved invaluable to the development of Bhutan.

He is a benevolent king - a people's king - that vows to maintain the national progress that places a high value on spiritual development. He is both highly respected and loved by his people.

“The country has succeeded in achieving the right balance between development and the preservation of tradition that dates back to the 1600s”

Getting to Bhutan is easier than one is led to believe although there are a few sensible conditions for visiting that most Western tourist destinations could have done better to adopt. Rather than attract 'low-cost, high volume' tourism, the Bhutanese government has wisely chosen to adopt a 'high value, low volume' tourism policy.

In their desire to minimise the adverse effects of tourism, a fine balance has been created that safeguards the country's existing infrastructure.

Funds generated from the growing tourism industry are ploughed back into where it is most needed, particularly the development of health, education and roads. It is satisfying to see that the money



The famous Tiger's Nest Monastery (Paro Taktsang), located just outside Paro, is one of the Bhutan's most famous monasteries. Legend has it that Guru Rinpoche flew there on the back of a tiger to the tiger's lair in the 8th century. Visitors ascend the slope on foot or on a mule.

spent in Bhutan is going to a good cause.

Tourists can only enter Bhutan through package tours organised by registered Bhutanese tour operators and controlled by government's strict pricing policy.

I chose Rainbow Tours and Treks (www.rainbowphototours.com) for my journey.

I found them to be excellent in their choice of locations, including some special places exclusive to Rainbow.

The guides and drivers were very knowledgeable, courteous and friendly. Travelling in a comfortable SUV definitely beats the 'Vomit Comet' (the local bus). I was free to stop at random to take in some of the most spectacular scenery. The large majority of roads wind

through the steep mountainous topography.

Druk Air is the sole airline operating to and from Bhutan. It links with various neighbouring countries such as India, Nepal, Thailand and Myanmar.

On one of my visits to a local primary school, I chatted with the school's principal on the development of Bhutan. He told me that they looked to more advanced countries for advice.

Considering that the country has succeeded in achieving the right balance between development and the preservation of tradition that dates back to the 1600s, I could not help thinking that it is the other countries that have much to learn from Bhutan.



An archer, wearing the traditional 'Gho' robe, aims at a bulls-eye some 150 metres away. He has to contend with his opponents using any means to distract him. Archery is the most popular sport.



A young monk looks out of a window overlooking a festival.



Dancers during a day-long festival geared up in colourful costumes. Each dance represents a legend.

TRAVEL ANDFOOD

DESTINATIONS P5
TIPS AND ADVICE P6
MY TRAVELS P8-9
RECIPES P12
WINES P13

REVIEW
DOUG'S
DINNERS
» PAGE 11



FESTIVALS
A RIGHT SPANISH
FIESTA
» PAGE 16



EVENTS
EDINBURGH
FESTIVAL
» PAGE 4



**Magical
Bhutan**

pages 2-3

Distributed by All...
...ers Ltd. under license from the...

Bhutan



Novice monks during playtime in the Chimi Lhakhang temple dedicated to the Divine Madman. Photos: Paul Zammit Cutajar



A tent with a view. Waking up to this view of a prayer pole overlooking the distant Himalayan mountains

Retracing footsteps of the 'Divine Madman'

Paul Zammit Cutajar

The distant jangling of bells was steadily approaching as the rest of the team was getting ready for the trek. The cook and his assistant were cross-checking the supplies as the four *sherpa* (guides) itemised the tents and equipment.

As Karma, my guide, oversaw the preparations, I stood on the footbridge adorned with colourful prayer flags. The pristine rushing waters bounced over massive boulders below my feet. I gazed up at the surrounding sub-Himalayas and the source of the water to see the majestic snow-covered peaks, which were just above what was to be our first destination.

By this time, the seven jangling mules arrived with their herdsman. The supplies and equipment were hastily loaded and with some excitement, and a dash of anxiety, we set off on a five-day 50 km trek in an endeavour to retrace the spiritual footsteps of the 'Divine Madman'. A paradox in itself - how can a divine man be construed as mad?

Maybe it is lost in translation. Perhaps 'crazy' or 'eccentric' would have been more appropriate. Amiable loved by the people of Tibet and avidly adopted by the Bhutanese, he is considered to be the 'Crazy Wise' teacher - and that he was.

Placed among the highest levels of sainthood, the Lam Drukpa Kunley was recognised as an incarnation of the great Mahasiddha.

Bhutan

His outrageous behaviour, often with strong sexual overtones and inclinations, were intended to awaken the dormant spirituality in people and yogi alike.

Dressed in rags, with a disregard for social standards, he roamed the valleys of the Himalayas armed with his bow and arrow, teaching in the most unorthodox but successful way to all and sundry.

His love for abundant drink and clever song, mixed with a sharp and critical humour, worked its wonders as legend, bizarre myths and countless mesmerising facts and fiction came to light. Everybody seemed to have a story to tell that had been handed down through generations.

But more than anything else, it was his power of good over evil that elevated him to his spiritual status.

"Dressed in rags, with a disregard for social standards, he roamed the valleys of the Himalayas"

The Divine Mad Man's coming to Bhutan was prophesied some hundreds of years before, by Guru Rimpoche, who brought Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century. On his first visit to Bhutan, it is said that he came across Chu (Water) Village. He sought refuge in a farmer's hut and set about building a *stupa* (mound-like structure containing Buddhist relics) in one day.

The villagers thought it an impossible accomplishment; but the Divine Madman had other ideas. It is believed that he chained the sun in the noon position until the *stupa* was built. When the sun was released it descended into the horizon at an alarming speed.

On continuing his journey he came across an isolated spot located on a mountain ridge where the Lhadang Goempa (a temple) was built in the 7th century. This temple, privately owned, is looked after by the hereditary Lama (a Tibetan teacher) and his family.



The team of mules ride past a *stupa*. It is obligatory to circle a holy place in a clockwise direction. Note the temple set high in to the mountain's face.

It was here that we came across a rare find. A cloth scroll outlining the footsteps of the Divine Madman was uncovered. It is now being translated by learned scholars.

Although many have made a fleeting visit to this revered temple, I happened to be the first foreigner to have spent more than one day. Having an open-air hot stone bath at 11,300 feet surrounded by snow-capped mountains is difficult to beat.

There is only one temple in Bhutan dedicated to the Divine Madman. Chimi Lhakhang was built in the Punakha Valley by his cousin, Lam Ngawang Chogyel. Today, it is one of the most revered and visited temple in Bhutan. Couples from all corners of the country, and indeed from other parts of the world, flock here

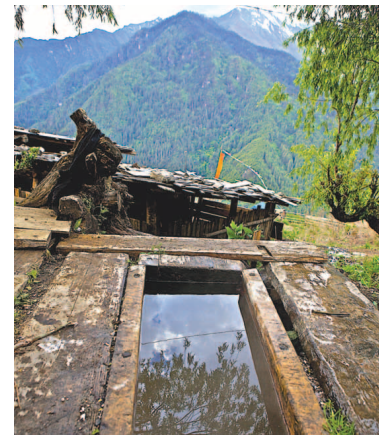
to seek fertility blessings for themselves and others. Some who are childless pray for fertility, other for the protection of children. Many will vouch that their prayers have been answered.

It is said that the Divine Madman has always been associated with giving life. He had also visited the site of the yet-to-be-built temple and prophesied its existence.

Phalls are elaborately painted on the outside of many houses. It is a symbolic representation of fertility and is closely associated with the Divine Madman. Century-old traditions, mixed with countless myths, legends and yarns have great significance in the daily life of the people of Bhutan. Believe if you will, believe if you won't, but it is undisputed that this is a land of spirituality.



Phalls are painted on most houses in Bhutan. They symbolise fertility and are closely associated with the Divine Madman.



The open-air hot-stone bath 11,300 feet above sea level. Hot stones are heated in a fire and then dropped into the water. Special wild flowers are sprinkled over the water including artemisia and marijuana.



The daughter of the caretaker of Lhadang Goempa looks out at the mules being unloaded.