



Wind Horse Travel

Paro Festival Description, Schedule and their significance.

Paro Tsechu Festival is one of the biggest event in Bhutan. Like other Tsechus, it held to honour Guru Rinpoche, who spread tantric Buddhism, that is practiced all over Himalayas. Paro Tsechu is held from 11-15 of 2nd month in Bhutanese calendar.

First day of the Paro Tsechu is normally held inside Rinphung Dzong, and the venue for rest of the days is outside in a open area. The final day concludes with unfurling of giant *Thongdrol* in the early hours before the sunrise, which is then folded back and *Wang* or blessings are provided.

The following is the sequence of dances at Paro Tshechu. Most dances are the same or similar to other Tshechus or festival in Bhutan, but the sequence varies. Between these mask dances, there are some folk singing and dancing. Even if you are not one of Wind Horse Tours Guest, please feel free to use this as a Guide to visiting a festival in Bhutan



Day One

Shinje Yab Yum: Dance of the Lord of Death and his Consort
Costume : buffalo mask and long brocade dress

Bodhisattva Jamba Yang or Manjushri, represents the wisdom aspect of all Buddha. In one other form, he is the lord of death, Shinje Gap. The dance is about the role of Jamba Yang as the lord of the dead. He is the ruler of the three worlds and protector of the four continents. He blesses the continents before the arrival on earth of the gods of wisdom.

Durdag : Dance of the Lords of the Cremation Grounds

Costume : white skull masks, short shirts and boot

This dance was composed by the Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The dancers represent the protectors of the religion who live in the eight cremation grounds on the external edges of the symbolic Mount Meru. They wear short white skirts, white boots, and white skull masks.

Zshana : Dance of the Black Hats

Costume : large black hat, felt boots and long, colourful brocade dress

The dancers wear brocade dresses, wide brimmed black hats and black aprons with an image representing the protecting deities whose images are kept in the goenkhang (chapel).

The black-hat dancers assume the appearance of yogis who have the power of killing and recreating life. It is believed that the gestures of the dancers' hands are transformed into mudras (sacred mystic gestures) and their feet, which pound the earth, form a mandala. The dancers first build a mandala and then cut the demons into pieces. Thus, they take possession of the earth in order to protect it and they dance the special thunderbolt step to impress their power on it. Because of its importance, Shabdrung himself used to perform this ritual. This is a ground purification rite, also performed for the construction of dzongs, temples and chortens. Its aim is to conciliate the malevolent beings of the ground in order to take possession of the site from them.

Dramitse Nga Cham : Dance of the Drums from Dramitse

Costume : varying animal masks and knee-length yellow skirt, big drums and curved drum sticks

The learned lama Kuenga Gyeltshen, son of the treasure finder Pema Lingpa, during his meditation, had a vision of Guru Rimpoche and his celestial paradise- Zangtho Pelri. The attendants of Guru Rimpoche take on the form of 100 kinds of peaceful and terrifying deities. Wielding a big drum and curved drum stick in their hands, they perform a dance that leave lasting impression upon Lama Kunga Gyeltshen. Kuenga Gyeltshen goes to Dramitse Goemba, in eastern Bhutan, where his sister Choiten Zangmo, is a nun and establishes the tradition of this dance that he saw in his vision.

Day Three

Shinje Yab Yum : Dance of the Lord of Death and his Consort
(same as Day one No.1 dance)

Zshana Nga Cham : Dance of the Black Hats with Drums

Costume: large black hat, felt boots and long, colourful brocade dress with drums

In honour of the victory of religion over the enemies, the black hats beat the great drums of Buddhism. The sound of the drums represents the religion itself, which cannot be represented in any other way because it has no visible form. The dancers wear large black hats, felt boots and a long, colourful, brocade dress.

Dance of the three kinds of Ging (Gingsum), with Sticks (Juging), with Swords (Driging), with Drums (Ngaging)

Costume : knee –length skirts, animal masks for the dance with the sticks, terrifying masks for the dance with swords and drums.

T This is the visual representation of Zangtho Pelri, the heavenly para-

Degye: Dance of the eight kinds of Spirits

Costume: animal masks and knee-length yellow skirt.

This dance is about the eight types of spirits who are the masters of the three worlds: sky, earth and underworld.

The eight comprise the Yaksas, the Mamos, the Shinjes, the Gyelpos, the Tsens, the Dus, the Lus and the Lhas. The eight spirits are evil deities that constantly torment sentient beings, causing great suffering. Their evil deeds are stemmed when gods such as Yeshe Gampo one of the most powerful in the pantheon of gods, manifest themselves as the chiefs of these eight evil deities. In this guise they are able to subdue the deities and restore peace. The doctrine of the Buddha prevails once more.

dise of Guru Rimpoche, as seen by Pema Lingpa. The dancers show how to subdue the demons that are creating obstacles to religion. Although the demons are fleeing throughout the three worlds, the Ging (beings that are emanations of Guru Rimpoche) with the sticks can find them , thanks to their knowledge. They catch them with the hook of compassion, beat them with the stick of wisdom and tie them with the noose of compassion.

The Lords of the cremation grounds bring a box that contains the mind and the body of these demons. Then the Ging with the swords purify the atmosphere from evil deeds that are caused by the demons. After the demons have been vanquished, the Ging with the drums, dance with happiness. For the dance with the sticks the Ging wear animal masks, and for the dance with the swords and the drums, they wear terrifying mask

Durdag: Dance of the Lord of Cremation Ground (same as Day one No. 2 dance)

Driging : Dance of the three kinds of Ging with Swords

Happiness return to the sentient beings and there is great rejoicing . In order that faith and wisdom be born, the dance was performed by the gods who had incarnated themselves into the form of the deities.

Religious Songs (Chhoshey)

Costume : long black skirt, yellow shirt, folded brown coat, felt boots, a circular head-dress and a sword.

This dance is performed to commemorate the opening of the gateway to the pilgrimage site of Tsari in Eastern Tibet by Tsangpa Jarey, founder of the Drukpa School. The costumes are similar to those in the Guitar Dance: elaborate and heavy woolen clothes, long black skirt, yellow shirt, folded brown coat, felt boots, a circular head-dress and a sword.

(same as Day two, No. 9 dance)

Ngaging : Dance of the three kinds of Ging with Drums

(same as Day two, No. 9 dance)

Shawa Sachhi : Dance of the Stag and the Hounds (1st part)

Costume : dog mask, stag mask and knee-length yellow skirts.

This dance represents the conversion of Buddhism of the hunter Gonpo Dorji by the Saint Milarepa. It is performed like a play in two parts. The first part takes place on the second day of Paro Tsechu, and the second part is on the third day of this Tsechu. The first part is quite comical; the hunter's servant appears and jokes with the clowns. Then comes the hunter, crowned with leaves, carrying a bow and arrows and accompanied by his tow dog. The servant jokes very irreverently with his master who, before going hunting, must perform some good-luck rituals. called, performs the ritual The priest who is called, performs the ritual in ways contrary to the Buddhist tradition, while the atsaras (clowns) and the servant go on with their jokes.

Day Three

14. Dance of the Lords of Cremation Grounds (Durdag)

(Same as day one, Dance No. 2)

Dance of the Terrifying Deities (Tungam)

Costume: beautiful brocade dresses, boots and terrifying masks
This dance is performed with the aim of delivering the beings by showing them Zangtho Pelri. The costumes are beautiful brocade dresses, boots and terrifying masks. This dramatic dance has a very deep symbolic meaning, namely that a sacrificial murder is performed. First the dancers representing the gods try to enclose the bad spirits in a circle and in a box. Once this is done, Guru Rimpoche, in the form of Dorji Drakpo (fierce Thunderbolt), kills them with a *phorbu* (ritual dagger). He thus saves the world from them and delivers them into salvation at the same time.

Dance of the Heroes with six kinds of Ornaments (Guan Drug Pawos)

The Pawos or mediums are called the Heroes with six kinds of ornaments because they wear five types of bone ornaments and hold in their hands a tiny drum and bells (considered as one). They dance with the purpose of being seen by both the gods and sentient beings. They arouse the assembly of the Gods and the Tantras from the state of indifference by the sound of their divine drums and lead sentient beings, caught in the wheel of reincarnations, along the path of liberation.

Kyecham: Dance of the Noblemen and Ladies (Phole Mole)

This dance depicts events in the life of King Norzang. It is a comical and very crude play rather than a dance.

The actors are two princesses, an elderly couple and the clowns (Atsaras). The prince goes out for war and leave the princesses in the care of the old couple. As soon as they depart, the clowns frolic with the princesses and corrupt the old woman who is also misbehaving. Upon the return of the prince (s), scandalised by the behavior, the noses of the princesses and the old lady are cut off as punishment. Then a doctor is called to put the nose back, but the old woman smells so much that the doctor has to use a stick because he does not want to approach her. Finally, the prince (s) marries the princesses and everything is reconciled.



Dance of Stag and Hounds

Shawa Shachhi - Len Cham : Dance of the Stag and the Hounds (part 2)

This is the conclusion of the dance staged on the second day and is more serious and religious. Milarepa appears, wearing a long white dress and a white hat, holding a pilgrim's staff. He holds his right hand near his ear and sings in a soft voice. The dogs, the stag and the hunter arrive and Milarepa converts them with his song. The conversion is symbolised by a rope that the dogs and the hunter have to jump.



Day Four

19. Dance of the Lord of Death and his Consort (Shinje Yab Yum)

(same as day one, Dance No. 1)

Dance of the four Stags (Sha Cham)

Costume : knee-length skirts and masks of antlers

This shows how Guru Rimpoche subdued the God of the Wind, who created much unhappiness in this world and rode the stag which was the Wind God's mount. The dancers in the role of stags wear yellow knee-length skirts and masks of horned deer.

This dance extols the victory of Guru Rimpoche over the Wind God, who was also is the lord of the North / West direction.

It tells of a time, when the Wind God used his power to bring about suffering and misery in the world. Guru Rimpoche subdues the wind God and restores peace and happiness to the world. As a show of his victory, Guru Rimpoche rides the stag, which is the mount of the Wind God.

The stag dance came into existence after the first incarnation of Nam Nyin (Namkhe Nyinpo) found the curved head of the stag. During this dance, the gratitude of pious people is demonstrated as all agitators of the world have been overcome and happiness and peace reigns supreme.

Dance of the Judgement of the Dead (Raksha Mangcham)

This is based on the Bardo Thoedrol (Book of the Dead), a text hidden by Guru Rimpoche and rediscovered Karma Lingpa in the 14th century. This is one of the most important dances of the tsechu and is watched carefully by many old people in preparation for their own death.

When all beings die, they wander in the Bardo (intermediate state) waiting to be led by the love of the Buddha into the pure fields where no suffering exists. However, the Buddhas assume both peaceful and terrifying forms. Those who didn't adore the Buddhist doctrine do not recognize the Buddhism in their terrifying form and are frightened and can not be led into the paradises.

Shinje Chhogyel, Lord of Death, estimates the value of the white and black deeds during the Judgement. Also present are the White God and Black Demon who has records of every being from birth, and all the helpers who emanate under numerous forms. These include; the ox-headed justice minister, the wild hog-headed helper who takes account of the black and white deeds, the Khyung-headed bird who holds a small sword to cut the root of the three poisons (ignorance, envy, anger), and a big hammer to destroy the rocky mountains of sins, a lion-headed helper holds a lasso representing love and an iron chain representing compassion, the fierce bear-headed helper holds the magical noose binding the means and wisdom together and a saw to cut selfish-

ness, a serpent-headed helper holds a mirror reflecting all actions, and the monkey-headed helper weighs them on a scale.

All these helpers are called rakshas and they separate the black actions from the white actions of all beings. The frightening Court of Justice cannot be avoided by the damned beings. But after enduring certain sufferings, their sins are washed away and they are purified. This dance shows everyone that if they devote themselves to virtuous actions, they will be sent immediately to the pure fields and paradises and when after life, when they have to cross the Bardo and meet the helpers and the assembly of peaceful and terrifying deities, they recognize them as incarnations of Buddha and are delivered from the frightening Bardo.

The dance is like a play and lasts over two hours. First is the long dance of all the rakshas, the helpers of Shinje. Then Shinje himself appears, symbolised by a huge puppet holding a mirror. The White God and the Black Demon enter with them. The judgement begins. The Black Demon and his helpers perform a dance. The sinner, dressed in black and wearing a red hat, is frightened and tries to escape but is recaptured each time. From his basket a freshly severed cow's head is taken, implying that the sinner was responsible for killing it. As the judge weighs his actions, the White God sings of the merits of the man and the Black Demon expounds the sins. Finally a black strip of cloth symbolising the road to hell is spread and the sinner is sent to hell.

After a general dance everyone sits again. Another man arrives, clad in white and holding a prayer flag and a ceremonial scarf. The same scene is re-enacted and at the conclusion, a white strip of cloth, symbolising the road to heaven, is deployed. Fairies elaborately dressed in brocade and bone-ornaments come to fetch him. At this point, the Black Demon, furious at having lost this being, tries to grasp the virtuous man but the White God protects him.

Dance of the Drums from Dramitse (Dramitse Nga Cham) (Same as Day one, Dance No. 4)



Day Five

The Great Paro Thongdrol is unfurled early in the morning and a Shugdrel ceremony performed.

The giant appliqué depicts Guru Rinpoche and his eight manifestations. Bhutanese believe that these giant Thongdrol are the workmanship of gods and goddesses because a mere human could not do it. It is unfurled only once a year after such pomp and festivities.

Shugdrel Ceremony (blessing and Offering Ceremony performed by the Monk Body in front of the Thanka). Regardless of the size and importance of any auspicious occasion, the Shugdrel Ceremony is done to show the main achievement of the Glorious Drukpa. For this Shugdrel Ceremony, there are three of five accomplished elements as follows :

An accomplished place

It is here in the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Valley of Medicinal Herbs where the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Shakya Thubpa (the historical Buddha) Ugyen Rinpoche (the saint who leads people away from the five impurities) and the powerful Drukpa shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, have diffused the Tantras.

An accomplished master

He is Ugyen Pema Jungne who incorporates within himself all the Buddhas. His image can be seen on the great Thanka which liberates all from bad reincarnations.

An accomplished retinue

The holy clergy and even the devout people who wear rich clothes and ornaments are in the middle of the assembly like a gathering of celestial stars.

An accomplished time

This is when religious practices continuously flourish, ranging from reciting Mani and Baza Guru up to the practice of the Tantric path.

An accomplished requisite for offerings

All kinds of offerings are combined, good food and fruits, prayer flags, nectar like alcohol, tea and sweet-smelling incense.

Like cheerful minded gods in a small grove of trees, a number of men and gods are seated in rows (literal meaning of Shugdrel) and are making these offerings. This good custom is called the Shugdrel Ceremony.

Dance of the Heroes (Pacham)

Costume : knee-length yellow skirt and golden crown. The dancers hold a small bell (drilbu) and a small drum (Damaru).

When Pema Lingpa arrived at Zangtho Pelri, he saw Guru Rinpoche sitting among his assistants, in the cen-

tre of a limitless mandala (mystic geocentric figure) which was made of lines of rainbow beams. This dance is to lead the believers of the human world into the presence of Guru Rinpoche. The dancers wear yellow skirts and golden crowns without a mask. They carry a small bell (dri-lbu) and a small drum (damaru).

Dance of the Ging and Tsholing

Costume : The Tsholing wear long colourful dresses and terrifying masks. The Ging wear orange skirts, terrifying black and orange masks with a flag on top, and hold a big drum and a curved drumstick.

On the occasion of the consecration of the Samye (the first Monastery of Tibet), Guru Rinpoche initiated this dance to show the people of Tibet the Zangtho Pelri, his celestial realm. When the ging and tsholing perform this miraculous dance, they demonstrate their magical powers in order to discourage the demons. The ging wear orange skirts which hang like a skin, terrifying black and orange masks with a flag on top and holds a big drum. They represent the assembly of heroes, deities and fairies (khandroma) as well as the various male and female terrifying deities. On the outside dance the tsholing, who represent the protectors of religion, wearing long colourful dresses and terrifying masks.

The dance is a ceremony of purification before the arrival of Guru Rinpoche. People whistle to chase away bad spirits and the Ging hits everybody on the head with their drumsticks to chase impurity out of the body. After having destroyed the evil spirits (symbolised by an effigy in a black box), the Tsholing are chased away by the Ging who then stay alone to beat their drums and perform a victory dance.



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Dance of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rimpoche (Guru Tshen Gye)

The eight different forms of Guru Rimpoche are represented in this dance. With Guru Rimpoche are his two consorts, Mandarava on the right and Yeshe Tshogyal on the left.

This dance is a play and a dance at the same time. People believe in the manifestation of Guru Rimpoche during the dance. Guru Dorji Drakpo enters first, dressed in a colourful brocade dress and wearing a terrifying red mask

The eight manifestation enter as follows:

Tshokye Dorji in a brocade dress, a peaceful-looking, blue-green mask and carrying a small thunderbolt, Loden Chogsey in a red brocade dress, peaceful whitish mask, carrying a small drum and a bowl, Padsambhava wearing a red and yellow monk dress, white mask and tall red hat, Guru Rimpoche, himself, under a canopy, wearing a golden mask (accompanied by fairies – khandroma, as attendants, symbolised by small children with white masks).

Shakya Senge is wearing a red and yellow monk dress, Buddha-like mask with blue hair, and carrying a bowl.

Padma Gyalpo in a red brocade dress, orange bearded mask with white tufts of hair, carrying a small drum and a mirror

Nyima Yoezer wearing a golden brocade dress, yellow bearded mask with blue tufts of hair, and carrying a trident and Sengye Dradrok in a blue brocade dress and terrifying blue mask, followed by his retinue who also wear frightening blue masks.

Guru Rimpoche sits under a canopy, followed by Shakya Senge, while all the other manifestations dance turn by turn as people rush to be blessed by Guru Rimpoche. When the manifestations finishes their dance, they joins and seat with Guru Rinpoche.

Then appear 16 fairies who sing and perform two dances in front of the Guru and his manifestations. They dance, first holding drums, then small bells and small drums. They have brocade dresses and carved bone-ornaments. After these dances, everybody goes out in a long procession.

Dance of the Sixteen Fairies (Rigma Chudrug)

The sixteen fairies (Rigma Dhudrug) are sixteen emanations of the same person. They are Goddesses of offerings who are divided into four categories. Each category is again divided into four, totaling 16.

The dance brings total happiness for the people who believe in the manifestations of Ugyen Rimpoche. It is a celebration of the changeless faith in the glorious deeds of Ugyen Rimpoche's mind, speech and body.

Chhoshey: Religious Songs (same as Day one, No. 6)

This dance is performed to commemorate the opening of the gateway to the pilgrimage site of Tsari in Eastern Tibet by Tsangpa Jarey, founder of the Drukpa School. The costumes are similar to those in the Guitar Dance: elaborate and heavy woolen clothes, long black skirt, yellow shirt, folded brown coat, felt boots, a circular head-dress and a sword.

