It’s beautiful and serene here in the highlands. The light combs through the trees and leaves friendly rays on the blooms, every acre of Bhutan filled with a warm promise. Springtime in March is traditional festival time in Bhutan, the community gathering in twos, threes, even tens and more to watch colourful dances with bold and bright masks and costumes. The music rings loud, the mood stays light.

Four years ago, we landed in her warm but dry summer, just in time to work the potato and buckwheat farms with the local farmers, hike through her numerous valleys and pastoral lands. And during our first trip in the frigid winter of 2014, we experienced the infinite warmth of locals who introduced us to suja (Bhutanese butter tea) and opened up their kitchens and backyards to cook us fresh hot meals. Thanks to our partner, Druk Asia, we are blessed to be able to visit this fabled destination thrice!

Still, the gentle, unembellished ways and stories of Bhutan and her people remain fascinating and inspiring. This is a country that has kept fast food chains out of sight, persisted on organic agriculture free from pesticides. She has banned the sale of tobacco and boasts of having one of the only two national capitals in the world with no traffic lights. Just recently on 1 April 2019, the kingdom has also reinforced the ban on the use and sale of plastic bags. The epitome of sustainability, we have much to learn from the ambition and determination of this landlocked Himalayan kingdom in keeping the country unspoiled from rapidly growing modernity.

Bhutan is equal parts cloud and shroud, spiritual and sustainable, lofty landscapes and down-to-earth people. The Soup Spoon and Druk Asia are therefore souper stoked to present to you this stunning photojournal, a special curation of the photos we took in our three trips, showcasing Bhutan’s culture, community, cuisine and how easy it is to choose good in this happy country!

This is Bhutan, Unfiltered.
CONTENTS

CULTURE 4
COMMUNITY 28
CHOOSE GOOD 46
CUISINE 72
Culturally, Bhutan is unquestionably spiritual. It’s the foundation of the kingdom’s architectural feats of magnificent dzongs and holds the secret to her colourful festivals. Here’s a peek into Bhutan’s customs and celebrations that bind the ethnically diverse people together.
Religion is at the core of Bhutan and you really wouldn’t want to miss these exuberant religious festivals known as tshechus! Colourful, lively expressions of Bhutan’s ancient Buddhist culture, every temple and dzong in the country hosts a tshechu on different months. Tshechu means “tenth day” and festivals are held on the tenth of their chosen month in honour of Guru Rinpoche, the saint who introduced Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century.

It’s clear as day the intimate link between tsechus and the social fabric of the Bhutanese. These festivals are exceedingly significant to families and communities as they gather and consider it a blessing to be able to watch the festivities. Through elaborate dances in bold and bright costumes, the tsechus are a rich form of oral history tradition for the community, deepening their faith and devotion while creating merry moments and socialisation opportunities for the people.

TSECHUS
Punakha Talo Tschechu is an annual three-day event held in the ground above Talo Dzong.

Like a new year of sorts, it is common for family members to travel back home to be part of the celebrations at the festival. Even farmers who work round the year take a brief respite and dress up in their festive finery to participate in the tsechu, making it one of the biggest events in the district.
Talo Tsechu is known particularly for its stag dance with embellished stag masks and swords. The dance symbolises consecration of the land for spiritual purposes.
An equally popular attraction is the classical dance by the Talo dance troupe in their elegant traditional Bhutanese kira!
The **Gasa Tshechu** is a multi-day festival held at the Gasa Dzong in the small district in Gasa, typically attended by nomads—the highlander communities of Laya and Lunana villages. When we were there, there were few tourists like us, largely due to the remote location deep in the northwest villages of Bhutan. Access to the dzong is still rudimentary but if you have the time, the road trip to the age-old festival is an experience in itself!
The Gasa Tschechu has evolved over the centuries as culturally important ceremonies to reinforce the spiritual values of the people. Carefully choreographed dances with bright masks and costumes tell enthralling stories, invoke deities—a unique swirl of colour and celebration!
In The Dance of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, we see a procession depicting the eight aspects Guru Rinpoche manifested himself as on various occasions. Guru Rinpoche or “Most Precious Master”, is the chief aspect but he is curiously not listed as one of the Eight Aspects. You can spot him here as the one wearing a human mask of gilded copper with a crown-like hat, attended by two monks while a third shades him with a parasol.
The quiet district of Gasa comes alive with these indigenous dances of Buddhist mythology, used in part to wash away the sins of all who participate in the festivals. Spectators come decked out in elaborate gear of silk robes and adornments, with eager children clinging on to their parents for a better view of the festivities.
The scenic backdrop to impending festivities of Paro Tsechu.
Monks in serene prayer as droves of visitors begin flocking into the dzong for Paro Tsechu.
The Paro Tshechu is by far the biggest springtime event in Bhutan, attracting thousands of people to the city to socialise and dance.

Celebrated in the city of Paro, the Paro Tsechu is one of the most dazzling springtime festivals in the whole of Bhutan, witnessed by thousands of locals and tourists gathered in the courtyard of the dzong.

Located in Western Bhutan and a mere hour’s drive from the airport, the location makes this festival a convenient and popular one for tourists even on short visits.
Monks and laymen dress up in distinct brocade costumes and intricate masks to reenact Buddhist legends and history, while also thanking deities for their blessings.
The culminating moment of the festival is a dramatic unrolling of a four-storey high Buddhist religious scroll (thangka), said to be more than 350 years old!
As you have seen in the pages before, it’s difficult to traverse the kingdom without passing through a dzong (fortress) on a nearby mountain. Dzongkha is Bhutan’s official language and it literally means ‘the language spoken in the dzongs and administrative centers in all the districts of Bhutan. Such is the level of significance dzongs command in Bhutan! More than just a temple, a dzong is a fortress-like structure that once served as defence against invaders, but now continues to be used as the headquarters of a district monastic body and administration.

We met many fellow visitors on the way and as a fellow traveller put it, “After a few days, I’m all dzong-ed out!” Many dzongs are worth visiting for their architectural prowess and artistic traditions, but don’t hesitate to speak to your tour operator if dzongs aren’t really your entire idea of exploring the elusive Kingdom of Bhutan!
Arguably one of the most beautiful dzongs in the kingdom, Punakha Dzong tells of ancient stories and triumphs. It has weathered several disasters like flood and fire and much has been rebuilt in 2003.
The Taktsung Palphug Monastery in Paro Valley, popularly known as Tiger's Nest, clings to a granite cliff more than 3000m above sea level. Legend has it that the Guru Rinpoche flew here from Tibet on the back of a tigress and this monastery was consecrated to tame the demon. Guru Rinpoche was also said to have meditated in a cave here for three years, three weeks, three days and three hours in the 8th century. The hike up to the monastery is steep with some eight hundred or more steps of irregular height towards the end and can be somewhat exhausting in the high altitude and thin air. It is said that every Bhutanese will make a climb up to the revered site of Tiger's Nest at least once in their lifetime.
Can you spot the face of Guru Rinpoche on the surface of the **Tiger’s Nest** at this vantage point? The Bhutanese are such architectural wonders! We left the monastery in the mountain in its pristine pride. The clouds slow-danced on.
With merely a population of 735,000 people, it seems like someone always knows someone and there's always somebody you can call for a cup of suja or to watch archery with. Bhutanese are often so warm, welcoming and wise you forget you have just met them. Come, let's meet some of the happiest people on earth.
Say hello to **Uygen**, our guide for two of our three trips! With a smile as broad as his shoulders and a memory sharper than anyone’s I know, this man knows just about every nugget of history of his beloved country! He has guided us through valleys and mountains, chopped chillies and gamely eaten whatever we cooked or foraged. From a guide to a friend, we are **ouper** thankful to be able to see Bhutan through and with him!
Our guide for the third trip, Mrs TP, is one of the rare 11-12 active female guides in Bhutan! This incredibly capable lady does some 40-45 trips a year, no mean feat for a mother of two in a male-dominated field. She shared that hotels typically do not set aside separate rooms for female guides so it’s common for her to have to share the same room as other male guides. With experience and respect gained over the years to become the seasoned and senior guide she is today, she coyly added that she does enjoy some special privileges from time to time so she isn’t inconvenienced as a female guide! Did I mention that she is also an experienced trekker and a souperb cook?
Fine spring weather means spontaneous picnics with groups and guides we meet!
We met this sweet trio of schoolgirls and like many Bhutanese children, they are articulate and sporting, while simultaneously reserved and earnest. They posed for many a photo for us!
The Buddhist faith is tightly woven into the fabric of Bhutan’s cultural and national identity. For centuries, the monasteries have provided a home and education to many Bhutanese children, mainly the less privileged. Officially, these monasteries take in children seven and older though you may sometimes see monks of younger age. Monk or otherwise, play is still paramount to a child. That doesn’t and shouldn’t change.
School-going children we met are exceedingly independent, seemingly with a glowing gown of quiet confidence that spreads from the inside to the outside. The ones in the city and bigger districts are measured and eloquent and we love how they stop every so often to greet and chat with other children they meet on the streets.
Humble farmhouses—the gateway to rolling hills and tight-knitted communities.
Even in guesthouses or lodges we’ve stayed in, staff feel like family. Hospitality seems like an integral trait of Bhutanese. Slow meals with the attentive staff are always something we look forward to in each stay.
Our hosts showed us so much kind hospitality and gave us free reign of their kitchens. We exchanged simple kitchen tips, experimented with new foods, partook in traditional methods of cooking and gatherings. Glasses are clinked, plates are passed around, memories made and kept.
In one of our hikes, we met this stout man with a dog next to him. His job was to clear the trails of fallen branches and loose stones so hikers and farmers traversing could have a safer path. He was quick to notice the foraged ferns in our hands and pointed out to our guide that more than half of what we picked were inedible wild ferns! All thanks to him, we are still alive now!
We met this lovely girl who gave us directions on the easier and less muddy routes to take. She even helped us to forage ferns. Independent, polite, eloquent and confident, she left a deep impression on us all.
In the more rural parts of the country, children hang out a lot on the farms, zipping up and down winding hills. As we were foraging for fiddlehead ferns, this little boy followed us for a while, shy yet inquisitive. He tugged at a necklace, twiddled with our hair. We’ve left pieces of our hearts there.
The national sport of Bhutan is archery but we’ve seen more Bhutanese kids play ball. With such unbridled joy! We joined in a short game of kick-and-giggle with a family, then retreated to let the boy show us his dribbling prowess.
As we played ball, the sister engaged herself in a game of hide-and-seek, hiding behind tapestries and hanging upside down with confidence and ease.
Walking is the primary mode of transportation for many and it’s a wonderful sight to see how many Bhutanese stop and greet other members of the community. That said, the roads can often be long and rough. Bhutanese are gritty, that’s clear to see.
Our community of tireless, humourous guides and hosts who have made all our three trips welcoming and fascinating. We are grateful.
The sustainability efforts of Bhutan are deeply intentional, widely adopted and the results, immensely gratifying. Her expansive lands are the perfect demonstration of simplicity and stewardship of what nature has to offer. Join us as we languish in Bhutan’s simplicity and explore her down-to-earth and back-to-basic ways in appreciating and preserving what nature has blessed her with.
Bhutan has banned the sales of pesticides and herbicides, and agriculture is wholly organic, so much so that few products are labelled organic anymore.
By law, at least 60% of Bhutan must remain forested for all times to come. Her environmental and cultural conservation ensures that the fragile environment does not fall prey to derelict tourists and unnecessary modernism.
Bhutan’s revenue comes from mainly exporting hydroelectric power to India, tourism and agriculture. Whatever revenue it generates is intentionally ploughed back into the community, the preservation of the kingdom’s natural biodiversity and anything that promotes the country’s wider philosophy of Gross National Happiness that Bhutan has come to be famous for.
At Thimphu City, where traffic is supposed to be the heaviest across the kingdom as it is the capital where most corporations, schools and government organisations reside, we saw how orderly and efficient the traffic was.

A landlocked country of about 38,394 square kilometres and 735,000 people, Bhutan boasts of having one of the two national capitals in the world with no traffic lights. The capital takes pride in its traffic police from the Royal Bhutan Police that directs and controls traffic in structures akin to toll booths. We stood on the street for a while, part amused, part impressed by the traffic cops who wave their arms with assertion at the city’s busy intersections.

In 1995, traffic lights were installed as a pilot test to perceive the needs on the ground but most failed to follow, so it was back to the trusty cops. No reliance on technology, just good old law and order.
Cattle range freely in Bhutan and once in a while, you’ll spot idyllic ones chilling by the roads with nary a care.
Nakey or fiddlehead ferns grow wildly along many trails and with the help of our guide and some locals, we foraged quite an impressive bunch for dinner. We also found an avocado tree uphill, the unripe avocados camouflaged by surrounding greens. The locals are most hospitable in inviting hikers to pick and enjoy the spoils of the land. It’s deeply humbling—the work that goes behind the food brought before us on the table.
A buzzing potato farm in Bumthang, owned by a young Bhutanese.
The farmers here use tractors kindly donated by Japan to plough the land and loosen the soil so harvesting is less arduous. In the past, potatoes were mostly homegrown in a small kitchen patch for own consumption. In the 1970s, potato farming became large scale and potatoes were regarded as a cash crop for sale to India.
Children were chasing one another around with dried mud stains on their knees, faces full of glee. We asked to help harvest the potatoes and everyone welcomed us with bemusement. We bent down, picked up potatoes big and small and threw them into baskets spread around the fields. After twenty minutes of harvesting, we looked up with pride at our basket, only to realise how much fuller the other baskets were.

Hello, potatoes. Still caked with soil, these are precious crops the result of much hard work.
Once a widely-grown and prevalent traditional crop, buckwheat has been gradually abandoned by farmers for other cash crops such as rice and potatoes that provide higher yields with less effort. In Bumthang, where most of the buckwheat still grows, we were blessed to be able to join a farmer in his harvest of buckwheat.
That morning, the sun rose high and showered the russet buckwheat fields with a deeper glow. In the middle of the field sat a genial farmer in his sixties, whacking hard at the buckwheat stalks with a long stick to ‘beat the seeds out’ with. The buckwheat harvests are then used as grain alternatives or milled as buckwheat flour to be made into pancakes, noodles and the like.

As a rough estimate, this farmer’s buckwheat field can yield only about 20kg of seeds or about 8 kg of buckwheat flour per harvest. Buckwheat used to be food for the poor, but with its decline due to the labour-intensive harvesting process, prices have since gone up three-fold. Even though Bumthang is a buckwheat-growing valley, production is low and yields have been underwhelming. The humble buckwheat has seen grander times, but the farmers are just as principled to keep everything organic.
In July when we visited, it was honey harvesting season, but we were told that there was a global shortage of bees and production was limited. The honey factory owner almost didn’t let us buy any honey as his priority was to sell to the locals, particularly the restaurants and lodges. We were finally allowed to buy a limited quantity after our guide persuaded him to let us bring some back to Singapore to share with our customers.
Like many local factories, this bee farm and honey factory runs a small production. An elderly lady uses a small machine to bottle the honey from barrels and a younger lady caps the bottles manually before packing them in cartons of twelve. She’s also the one sticking the labels on the bottles. The modest set-up is typical of Bhutanese agricultural landscape—lean and clean with no frills.
The founder of this Swiss cheese factory in Bumthang came to Bhutan more than 40 years ago responding to an advertisement in a Swiss newspaper for a cheese-maker in the Land of the Thunder Dragon. The gouda is kept for at least three years to mature in taste. "With customer, three years, ready! No customer, another three years," quipped our guide.
The Centenary Farmers’ Market is one of the biggest domestic markets for Bhutanese farmers. Located near the main town in Thimphu, the double-storied building houses about 400 stalls selling organic produce of vegetables, fruits, rice, spices, mushrooms etc, as well as incense and a cozy little cafeteria.

Summer is the season for nakey, curly and tender fern fronds also known as fiddlehead ferns, as well as the highly-prized matsutake mushrooms. In Japan, matsutake mushrooms are really pricey so I was *ouper* pleased to find them in amazing abundance and affordability in this market! Look how dwarfed my hand is!
Summer is the season too for plums and peaches. Almost every fruit stall laid the stone fruits proudly in baskets, the rich purple of the plums and velvety cream and coral tones of the peaches glowing above other fruits. Till this day, we’re still very much amazed how such beautiful produce come from traditional farming methods free of chemicals!
The most eco-friendly way to bag home your groceries! It’s common to see female shoppers holding woven baskets and the men storing their purchases in their gho, the traditional gear of a long gown belted at the waist for Bhutanese men. On 1 April 2019, the kingdom has reinforced a ban on the use and sale of plastic bags, 20 years after the first notification was issued. Packaging of vegetables and homemade edible items for sale with the transparent plastic will still be allowed.
While driving up a mountain, we enjoyed a fresh harvest of corn grilled on an open fire by the roadside. The evening wind was turning chilly and we kept by the fire, thankful for its warmth. After finishing the corn on the cob, we asked for the nearest bin. “No bin, just throw down the mountain! Food for the forest!” We realised that’s the Bhutanese way of composting and making sure nothing goes to waste. They are most careful though—only food scraps allowed!
We also realised how we have not seen anyone smoke throughout our trip. It was then we found out that Bhutan is the first nation in the world to have successfully banned the sale of tobacco countrywide. While Bhutanese are still allowed to smoke, they are not to do so in public.
Our worldly obsessions with consumerism, our disposable culture, our indiscriminate pursuit of modernity have consequences far more dire than we can ever imagine. Preserving the natural environment hasn’t been easy for Bhutan these recent decades, with the bane of global warming weighing heavily. So, thank you Bhutan, for showing us the way to sustain development yet remain responsible towards Mother Earth. Thank you for showing us traditions need not be compromised in the face of modernity. Thank you for your beautiful people who value simplicity and happiness above creature comforts. Thank you for letting your seasons, your produce and your land be our inspirations.
Food transcends all boundaries and all our three trips to Bhutan were marked by this respect for food as we exchanged stories and traditions with our hosts. "To zowa sho" means “come eat” in Dzongkha. This simple invitation encapsulates our belief that eating is an inherently communal act! Feast your eyes and soul as we walk you through Bhutanese cuisines and the fruits of our cookouts!
Sometimes it’s the simple things that make the boldest, most heavenly pairings. Leave the fancy elements behind, and just let this chilli cheese shine.

**Ema datshi**, they call it. *Ema* means chilli, *datshi* means cheese. In Bhutan, chilli is regarded more like a vegetable than a spice and is used generously, creatively and frequently. If Hainanese Chicken Rice is to Singapore, we wouldn’t be too far off to say *ema datshi* is to Bhutan. I don’t think we’ve had a meal in Bhutan that isn’t served with *ema datshi*! Chilli and cheese, the unlikely combination that is definitive of every Bhutanese meal.

Every home cook knows how to make *ema datshi*. Curiously, as ubiquitous as this dish is in Bhutan, each version we tried exuded individuality. Most used fresh red or green chillies, the former making the *ema datshi* a tad spicier, especially if the seeds were left to lend a more fiery punch. In winter when there is no harvest, dried chillies are used. We had the pleasure of tasting one such version and like the Bhutanese, we could eat this with rice alone!
We are not done with chilli yet! At our guide’s brother’s home, we learned how to make the Bhutanese multi-use fiery hot chilli condiment, **ezay**. Unlike Singapore’s sambal chilli and Spain’s salsa that are served with specific dishes, the **ezay** is a condiment that comes with almost everything. We’ve seen the Bhutanese eat it with vegetables, poultry, fried noodles and even on top of *ema datshi*. Chilli with chilli—the Bhutanese truly like things spicy!

**Ezay** is traditionally made with **thingey**, a locally-grown peppercorn. Its backing heat and the red chillies make this condiment a perfect one to have in winter but also possibly a shock to palates that aren’t used to the level of spice the Bhutanese love.

The beauty of **ezay** is that it heightens the clean flavours of Bhutanese cuisines, despite the sharpness of the spices.
We love the sound of “momos” and love the taste even more! Bhutan’s beloved momo, a dumpling not unlike our local “wanton”, are versatile and enjoyed any time of the day. Like most dumplings, interpretations are vast—made with meat, cheese or vegetables, steamed or fried and always plump and dense. Our guide made us her version with mashed potatoes and ginger, delicately wrapped, scored and steamed into beautiful gems.
The Bhutanese cuisine has heavy Chinese, Tibetan and Indian influences. They eat a significant amount of rice, particularly red rice, a variety of rice that grows exceptionally well in high altitudes. With the fertile soil that Bhutan enjoys, irrigated with glacier water rich in minerals, Bhutanese red rice is highly nutritious, nutty in flavour and cooks easily to a soft and slightly sticky texture.

From the darker rustic russet hue to the lighter blush pink, it’s amazing how varied red rice can be. The friendly vendors invited us to feel the rice piled up in the sacks. The grains slipped through the gaps between my fingers, some grains broken, but most were full whole grains, a testament to the agricultural giants the Bhutanese are.
Our hosts served us red rice at every meal, even at breakfasts. As we tucked happily into our toasts (toasted on their cast iron griddles!) with local freshly churned butter and beautiful organic jam, the Bhutanese dug deep into their red rice, topped with *ema datshi*. On average, our guide Ugyen and our driver Panda take about two to three heaped bowls of red rice a meal. That’s how much the Bhutanese take to their red rice!
During our first trip to Bhutan, we were greeted with the most welcoming aroma as we stepped indoors into warmth, away from the frigid winter cold. It’s the aroma of zow, toasted rice mixed with butter and sugar. I ate the toasted golden grains like chips, crunchy and comforting. Bhutanese families like to stir zow into a cup of tea with butter or milk, like a cereal of sorts, then top it with sprinkles of sugar and a swirl of butter.
At daybreak, our lodge was draped in a friendly darkness, everyone still in deep slumber. The kitchen was where the magic happened. How we love the rusticity of everything here, especially the dosai pan they use to make the buckwheat pancakes! The Bhutanese believe that if you see a “mark” in the pancakes when they are being cooked, it’s an auspicious sign to signify influx of guests!

One of the traditional Bhutanese ways of eating these slightly bitter buckwheat pancakes was to make small slits to allow dollops of butter to melt right into the heart of the pancakes, then sprinkle salt to finish.
As part of a casual culinary exchange, we shared our way of eating pancakes—with wild orange root berries we picked and fresh lemon and mint from the garden! Here’s our pancake stack, affectionately nicknamed “stupa” by a guide from another tour group!
This stood out as one of the most delicious chicken dishes we’ve had in Bhutan—the chicken paa! Contrary to popular belief, most Bhutanese aren’t vegetarians. Much of the meat in Bhutan are imported from India and Bhutanese cuisine features much beef, mutton and chicken, propped up with the seasonal produce. Legend has it that in the past, locals used to “chop up dead bodies and throw them into the rivers so they become food for the fish”, hence till today, many Bhutanese refrain from eating fish or seafood, even though fish are aplenty in Bhutan.
We call this the Bhutanese pizza! This is mengay, a traditional local dish made from kneaded red rice mashed with butter, topped with ground black sesame, herbs and other seasonal ingredients. Eaten typically during the new year, we were a little saddened to hear that this dish is fast losing its popularity amongst the younger generations and few people know how to make it any more.
After a very healthy meal at a farmhouse, we learned from our guide how to make a **Bhutanese lentil soup**! Much of the protein sources for Bhutanese vegetarians are derived from lentils—a nutrient-dense, affordable and versatile crop. This gorgeous soup was made only from yellow lentils, garlic, onion, ginger and coriander and we were *souper* impressed by how the humblest of ingredients can produce such a hearty soup!
Bhutan’s spring weather is a dream—blue-amber skies with puffs of translucent clouds, lush green trees and flowers everywhere in their bloomy colourful glory. Too good a day to be indoors, our guide prepared a picnic for us after we attended Talo Psechu. Look out this magnificent spread of dishes! We ate a lot. How could we not?
A typical Bhutanese table. If you love vegetables, you will relish the fresh and hot meals here like we do!
Homemade buns, so intricate and beautiful. Looks like a cross between croissants and mantou, doesn’t it?
A traditional alcoholic beverage, ara is made from rice, wheat, maize or barley, fermented or distilled to form a clear looking or creamy liquor. Ara isn’t sold publicly and it is only within the home or farm confines that ara is produced and consumed legally in Bhutan. It is typically the womenfolk in the household who makes the ara. “The quality of ara depends on the quality of the woman who prepares it,” as we were told.

Fermentation of the barley, wheat, water and yeast takes a minimum of five months. The mixture is poured into a big pot to boil, and there is another slightly smaller pot of cold water placed on top to create condensation. When the water evaporates inside the bigger pot, the steam will touch the colder pot on top. Condensation then happens and causes the water droplets to drip back. There is also a rope tied around the outer pot to keep the alcohol from evaporating. This whole process takes about two hours. Our host added cordyceps and a few strands of saffron to flavour the ara in the inner pot. This is ara fit for royalty!
Here, we garnish the red rice porridge we made for our hosts with sprigs of homegrown herbs and crunchy peas!

The greens of summer and spring are surely Bhutan’s gifts to great inspirations. This is when the greens spring forth produce of all scents and colours. A well-kept backyard garden is all you need for the kitchen table. Mint stalks are thick and firm, almost like a shrub, no kidding! The freshness of the green mint can lift the weight off any salads or sauces, a must-have in the herb garden. The pungency of coriander adds depth to many stews and soups. Homegrown limes, lemons and tomatoes take on oddly beautiful shapes, and even the unripened ones have a subtle sweetness and perfect firmness to make the most hearty meal.
We were blessed to arrive in a season where mushrooms are in abundance, so what better way to celebrate the bounty of the season than with this wild mushroom soup, primped with more homegrown herbs!
The honest beauty of food comes alive in cookouts with our hosts.
The hands at work to bring food to the table. Together, we deseeded chillies, blanched chicken, chopped ginger—the camaraderie so warmly felt. We even got to serve the chicken rice to a grateful tour group from Singapore who had just arrived at the lodge!
At the rustic, homely Damji Farmhouse, we experienced Bhutanese cuisine made wholly from scratch, right down to milk freshly squeezed in the farm! Food can’t get any fresher than that!
A food-focused glamping experience at Tashithang! With the fiddlehead ferns we foraged earlier, we enjoyed a simple meal of Bhutanese fare. Quite the experience to remember!
It’s easy to choose good in a land whose people stick by principles to preserve the land. Likewise, you can’t help but taste only the good here—fresh and organic produce savoured in slowness, in spaces carved out to take in the modesty and serenity of the country. Let’s eat.
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