

BT
Living

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To Putao and beyond

Putao, Northern Myanmar
Golden Triangle/Putao,
Myanmar tour
(March 28 to April 3, 2009)
www.urbanenormads.com

WHEN it comes to remote destinations, Putao, the capital of Kachin state, north-east of Myanmar, is reachable only by air. It's one of those ideal locations in travel specialist Urbane Normads' itinerary, as the agency has access to a private jet for out-of-the-way destinations like this.

Some of the tours Urbane Normads is promoting for 2009 include a private jet tour covering Golden Triangle Thailand and Myanmar, and at Putao, guests will stay in a luxury resort designed by Jean Michel Gathy of Aman Resorts' fame.

"Private jet travel will be expensive but costs can be somewhat moderated by carefully choosing the points of access and the number of days in between flights," says Hajar Ali, one of the partners of Urbane Normads that was set up late last year. The company considers itself a "travel misologist" as it offers unique destinations paired with select accommodation and unusual travel modes.

Private jet travel is the main way she recommends going to Putao because of the erratic flight schedules from Myanmar. "After all the promise and allure of Putao's natural beauty, and the amount of preparation it'd take for additional permits to go there, you don't want to miss out because of a delayed flight!" she says.

The private jet tour offered to Putao in March revolves around an event – the Elephant Polo Championship in Chiang Rai – and is limited to a group of six to 12 people. "It thus becomes a social affair and allows for a group of friends to get together for an exclusive retreat," she adds.

Putao, meanwhile, is a town surrounded by snow-capped Himalayan mountains, and for those who want to test out their mountain-worthy legs, this is the nearest town to Mt Khakhaborazi, which at 5,889 metres is actually the highest mountain in South-east Asia, rather than Mt Kinabalu in Sabah.

For a place as remote as this, think flowing streams and rivulets, straw-roofed houses and pebble walls. The pastoral view is made complete with suspension bridges across rivers. Rare flora and fauna include black orchids and red pendants, black bears and deer.

The package cost is US\$10,686 per person on a twin-sharing basis. It includes the one-way economy fare for Bangkok-Chiang Rai, transfers from Chiang Rai airport to Anantara resort for the elephant polo tournament, three days at the Anantara resort (inclusive of transfers to the pitch, breakfast and lunch buffet at the pitch), and a day trip to Tachlek in Golden Triangle, Myanmar.

Also included are the private jet transfer to Putao, all meals and activities and accommodation in Malikha Lodge for three nights in Putao, and private jet transfer from Putao to Don Meuang airport in Bangkok.

By Chesh Ul-Hoon



BACK TO NATURE

Wake up to the rustic charms of Malikha Lodge in Putao (above). In Bhutan (left), a road journey across three valleys enables travellers to experience as much of the landscape as possible

as much of the Bhutanese terrain and landscape as possible – priced from US\$3,290 (single occupancy).

In November, it's also offering a photographic-based programme. *Bhutan Through a Lens* is seven-night adventure for photographers of all levels and interests. This will be led by Mr Bowen himself, a 16-year Bhutan veteran and accomplished photographer. Guests divide their time between Uma Para and a new Uma-owned 11-bed lodge in the distinctly different Para and Punakha valleys.

As part of Singapore's own Como group, one can expect Uma Para to offer designer facilities, with an injection of local culture such as Bakhari woodburning stoves, outdoor hot stone bathtubs and decor domed with traditional Bhutanese wall designs.

As for its other itineraries, what's covered are yoga retreats, local festivals, trips to monasteries, hikes to explore the local flora and fauna, and for the more urban-minded, even shopping – in December.

The kingdom with its constitutional king now allows 22,000 visitors to enter annually, up from 3,000 in 1992.

By Chesh Ul-Hoon

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"RATHER than seeing the country from the back of a car, the idea is to get you out of the car as much as possible," says Philip Bowen, activities director for the Como Group, which owns Uma Para.

The Como group prides itself on its designer itineraries, and not just its designer properties – hence the activity-packed programmes that you can opt for in the King-

dom of Bhutan – one of the accessible Shangri-la kind of places, yet unspoiled, in Asia.

To date, Uma Para has added twelve programmes for 2009 in its Adventure Retreat Series, which sees activities for almost every month of the year. The new additions are for August and November. For August, it's a multi-activity itinerary, where guests get to do marshalling every day for eight days – whitewater rafting, fly fishing, a round of golf, an overnight camping trek, mountain biking and a traditional archery tournament.

The journey will also take guests across three valleys, so that you get to experience

To Putao and beyond

In what looks to be a difficult year ahead, it's travel without the trappings that holiday-makers need. BT Weekend explores several value-added destinations where some of life's most simple yet enjoyable pleasures - pure white beaches, quiet time, unspoiled territory - can be discovered afresh.

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Photo: Kathryn King

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This article was first published in The Business Times on Jan 3, 2008.