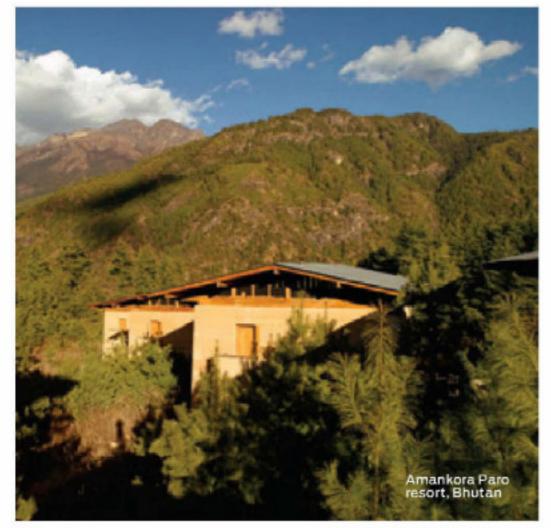


une-driving—the slightly insane, completely exhilarating experience of careening up and down sand dunes in a rollicking 4x4—is an absolute must during a trip to Oman, located just east of the UAE on the Arabian Sea. Read more about our top off-the-beaten-path travel picks in this issue's "Voyages."

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## BHUTAN

Nestled between China and India, this tiny landlocked nation is isolated by its geography but also by its government, which values Gross National Happiness over GNP and tradition over modernity. Since 1974, when Bhutan opened its doors to the outside world, the Himalayan kingdom has limited its tourism, and the effect is palpable: This is a country known as the last Shangri-la, where 16,000-foot peaks loom in a shroud of clouds and life seems to have stood still for centuries.

Stay Set on a hillside above the coniferous Paro Valley and within the snow-capped Himalayas. Uma Paro hotel is a perfect point from which to explore Bhutan's spectacular natural bounty. Traditional exteriors give way to clean, modern lines at this spa sanctuary by international tastemaker Christina Ong. All rooms feature oversize bathrooms and goose-down duvets, but opt for one of the many with stunning, panoramic mountain vistas. uma.paro.como.bz

**Unwind** Stay on-property for a private guided meditation session or yoga at Uma Paro's Como Shambhala Retreat wellness center. Or take a day trip to Amankora Paro, whose cedar-wood-scented spa boasts an open-air hot-stone bath. *uma.paro.como.bz*; *amanresorts.com* 

Explore Bhutan is known for its monasteries, but if you visit only one, it should be the Paro Taktsang, or Tiger's Nest Monastery. Perched on a rocky promontory some 3,000 feet above Paro Valley, the complex dates to 1692 and is one of the nation's most sacred sites.



## PERU

Peru is practically synonymous with the ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu, and the ruins are spectacular. But it has much more to offer, from island hopping in Lake Titicaca—the alleged birthplace of the Incas, at an altitude of 12,500 feet—to cruising the Amazon for glimpses of jaguars, monkeys and giant river otters. Peru is not just for backpackers and budget travelers, either: A bevy of new, luxurious eco-lodges and upscale outfitters means you can do South America in style.

Go Journeys to the coast, the mountains and the rainforest all start in Lima, which can be reached by most major airlines. Subsequent destinations are best accessed via local carriers, like LAN and Taca. lan.com; taca.com

Stay Inkaterra is Peru's leading luxury hotel group; its newest property,
La Casona, is the finest in the historical Incan capital of Cusco. The 16th-century colonial mansion, now an 11-suite inn, is outfitted with carefully culled antiques alongside modern conveniences such as iPod docks, Wi-Fi, pima cotton sheets and heated floors. inkaterra.com

**Dine** Celeb chef Gastón Acurio's first restaurant, Astrid y Gastón, is arguably the best of his growing lot. Set in a nondescript historic colonial house, the orange-hued eatery serves modern Peruvian fare like quinotto, a regional take on risotto using Andean quinoa. The crispy, whole suckling pig leg with carapulcra (a spicy stew with meat and potatoes) is a must. astridygaston.com



## OMAN

The Arab state of Oman has only recently opened to tourists, and while it is less ostensibly glamorous than the nearby UAE, its lack of development is the real draw: With miles of pristine coastline, it is possible to find your own stretch of beach, pitch a tent and relax in seclusion. There is also world-class snorkeling, plus vast expanses of desert and arid mountain ranges—not to mention a vibrant capital with fragrant souks and Arabian architecture.

Go This wintertime destination is easily reached on British Airways (via London) or Emirates (via Dubai). The capital city of Muscat is your jumping-off point—and a destination in and of itself. britishairways.com; emirates.com Stay A 15-minute drive from Muscat, Shangri-La's five-year-old Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa on the bay of Al Jissah features three distinct hotels. Choose the ultra-luxe Al Husn, which boasts an infinity pool and a private beach replete with nesting sea turtles. shangri-la.com

**Unwind** Either fly (a one-hour trip from Muscat) or drive to Khasab—you have to off-road through the Musandam Mountains to Zighy Bay, so make sure your vehicle is suitably equipped—for top-notch pampering at the world-renowned Six Senses Resorts & Spa, Oman's most highly regarded spa oasis. sixsenses.com