

### Paro

The first thing you will notice as you disembark is the transparent purity of air and the absence of noise. The Paro Valley has kept its bucolic nature in spite of the airport and the existence of development projects. Fields, brown or green depending on the season, cover most of the valley floor, while hamlets and isolated farms dot the countryside. The houses of Paro Valley are considered to be among the most beautiful in the country. Paro is believed to be one of the first valleys to have received the imprint of Buddhism.

#### Places to visit in Paro:

1. Kyichu Lhakhang [Lhakhang means Temple]
2. Taksang Monastery (Tiger's Nest)
3. Drugyel Dzong [Dzong means Fortress]
4. Duntse Lhakhang
5. Ta Dzong [National Museum]
6. Paro Dzong

### Thimphu

Thimphu lies in a wooded valley, sprawling up a hillside on the West Bank of the Thimphu Chhu [Chhu means River]. Thimphu is unlike any other world capital. Small and secluded the city is quiet and there are never the traffic jams familiar in other Asian Capitals. It is often said that Thimphu is the only world capital without traffic lights. Thimphu's main shopping street is a delight not so much for what you can buy there, but for the picturesqueness of the architecture and national costume. Beautiful weaves in wool, silk and cotton, basketwork, silver jewelry, thangkhas and other traditional crafts of the Kingdom are available in various Handicraft Emporiums.

#### Places to visit in Thimphu:

1. The Memorial Chorten [Chorten means Stupa]
2. Changlimithang [Battle Ground]
3. Weekly Market [Saturdays and Sundays]
4. Tashichoe Dzong [The biggest fortress in Bhutan]
5. National Library
6. School of Arts and Crafts
7. Royal Academy of Performing Arts
8. National Institute of Traditional Medicine
9. Zangto Pelri Lhakhang
10. Zoo
11. Changangkha Lhakhang

12. Drubthob Goemba [Nunnery]
13. Dechencholing Palace
14. Pangri Zampa Temple
15. Tango Goemba
16. Chari Goemba
17. Simthoka Dzong

### Recommended day hikes in Thimphu

1. Talo Monastery
2. Phajoding Monastery
3. Thadra Monastery
4. Trashigang Nunnery

### Punakha

Rinchen built a temple there which can still be seen today opposite to the great Dzong. Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel, a key figure in the History of Bhutan, built the Punakha Dzong and his body is preserved in one of the Dzongs' temples, Machen Lhakhang. The Dzong was damaged six times by fire, once by floods and once by earthquake. The coronation of Ugyen Wangchuk, the first king of Bhutan, took place at Punakha Dzong on 17th December 1907.

### Punakha Dzong

Wangdue Phodrang

The palace where the four directions are gathered under the power of the Shabdrung". However, the popular story has it that the Shabdrung arrived at the river and happened to see a boy building a sand castle. He asked for the boy's name, which was Wangdue, and thereupon decided to name the Dzong Wangdue Phodrang or 'Wangdue's Palace.' Wangdue Phodrang Dzong is perched on a spur at the confluence of 02 rivers. The position of the Dzong is remarkable as it completely covers the spur and commands an impressive view over both the north-south and east-west roads. The main road climbs the length of the spur and on the left, across the river, comes the first glimpse of the picturesque village of Rinchengang whose inhabitants are celebrated stonemasons.

### Phuntsoling

This small modern town in the south is the gateway of Bhutan for overland travelers. Like all other border towns, it is also a prelude. Phuntsholing is also a fascinating mixture of Bhutanese and Indian, a lively center for the mingling people, languages, customs and goods. On top of a low hill at nearby Kharbandi, a small Gomba situated in a garden of tropical plants and flowers overlooks the town and surrounding plains.

The Amo Chu, commonly known as the Torsa River flows alongside this town and it is favorite spot for fisherman and the picnickers. From Phuntsholing, the road winds north over the southern foothills, through lush forested valleys and around the rugged north-south ridges of the inner Himalayas to the central valleys of Thimphu and Paro. It is a scenic journey; forests festooned with orchids cover the mountains on the other side and exciting hairpin curves greet travellers with colourful sculptures of Tashi Tagye (The eight auspicious signs of Buddhism)

### **Trongsa**

Trongsa means 'the new village' and the founding of Trongsa first dates from the 16th century which is indeed relatively recent for Bhutan. It was the Drukpa lama, Ngagi Wangchuk (1517-54), the great grandfather of Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel, who founded the first temple at Trongsa in 1543. The landscape around Trongsa is spectacular, and for miles on the end the Dzong seems to tease you so that you wonder if you will ever reach Trongsa. The view extends for many kilometres and in the former times, nothing could escape the vigilance of its watchmen.

#### **Places to visit in Trongsa:**

1. Trongsa Dzong
2. Chendebji Chorten [Stupa]
3. Ta Dzong

### **Bumthang**

The Bumthang region encompasses four major valleys: Choskhor, Tang, Ura and Chhume. The Dzongs and the most important temples are in the large Choskhor valley, commonly referred to as Bumthang valley. There are two versions of the origin of the name Bumthang. The valley is supposed to be shaped like a Bumpa, a vessel that contains holy water, and Thang meaning flat place. The religious connotation of the name aptly applies to the sacred character of the region. It would be difficult to find so many important temples and monasteries in such a small area anywhere else in Bhutan.

#### **Places to visit in Bhumthang:**

1. Jakar Dzong [Castle of the White Bird]
2. Wangdichholing Palace
3. Lamey Goemba

4. Kurje Lhakhang [Ku means "body", Je means "imprint"]
5. Tamshing Lhakhang [Temple of Good Message]
6. Kencho Sum Lhakhang [known for its broken bell]
7. Member Tsho
8. Peling Sermon Chorten [Stupa]

### **Mongar**

The Mongar district is the northern portion of the ancient region of Kheng. Mongar is the district headquarters and hardly more than a stopping place surrounded by fields of maize. It is also the first town built in a mountain side instead of in a valley, a characteristic of eastern Bhutan where the valleys are usually little more than riverbeds and mountain slopes which rise abruptly from the rivers, flatten out as they approach their summits. One would never imagine that the upper parts of the mountains are so densely populated.

Shongar Dzong, Mongar's original Dzong, is in ruins and the new dzong in Mongar town is not as architecturally spectacular as others in the region. Dramtse Goemba, in the eastern part of the district, is an important Nyingmapa Monastery, but it is difficult to get there.

### **Places to visit in Mongar:**

1. Dramtse Goemba
2. Mongar Dzong

### **Lhuentse**

Lhuentse is an isolated district although there are many sizeable villages in the hills throughout the region. It is very rural and there are fewer than five vehicles, including an ambulance, and not a single petrol station, in the whole district.

Formerly known as Kurtoe, the region is the ancestral home of Bhutan's Royal Family. Though geographically in the east, it was culturally identified with central Bhutan, and the route over the Rodung-la was a major trade route until the road to Mongar was completed. To see and appreciate Lhuentse properly, with its many small villages and ancient temples, you should really explore on foot.

### **Trashigang**

Trashigang is one of the most densely populated districts in Bhutan. After Thimphu, Trashigang is the biggest urban center in mountainous Bhutan. It is the heart of eastern Bhutan

and was once the center of important trade with Tibet. There are several goembas and villages that make a visit worthwhile, but it is a remote region and requires a lot of driving to reach.

### **Places to visit in Trashigang:**

1. Zangtho Pelri Kanglung Lhakhang
2. Khaling Lhakhang
3. Radhi Lhakhang
4. Trashigang Dzong
5. Tashiyangtse Dzong
6. Gom Kora
7. Chorten Kora

### **Samdrup Jongkar**

The small frontier town is situated at the precise point where the mountains meet the plains. There is almost nothing of interest to the traveler in south-eastern Bhutan, however, it is one point to enter Bhutan through eastern side and vice versa with many nearby touristic places to visit in India. It is the headquarters of a district boasting a brand new Dzong, although it is basically a town of small shopkeepers who serve all of eastern Bhutan as far as Mongar and Lhuntshi. The tropical heat gives a languid air which is accentuated by a lack of busy traffic.