

SAMPLE TOUR ITINERARY



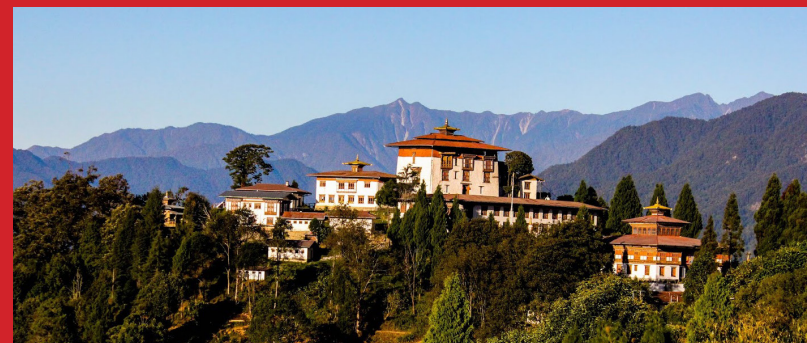
HISTORY AND CULTURE



ACCOMMODATIONS

ZHEMGANG

TOURISM ATTRACTIONS





ZHEMGANG

TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

- Sample Tour Itinerary
- History & Culture
- Accommodations

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SHINE (Sustainable Hospitality Industries Inclusive
of Native Entrepreneurs)

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Foreword

Tourism benefits have been rather concentrated in western Bhutan. Most of eastern and central areas are barely visited by international tourists, despite the vast potential of the attractions - pristine landscapes, rich cultural heritage, historical narratives and diverse ethnic minorities. The project “Sustainable Hospitality Industry Inclusive of Native Entrepreneur (SHINE)” funded by the EU SWITCH-Asia Programme aims at more inclusive tourism development in Bhutan, by promoting the indigenous and authentic tourism resources of the eastern and central Bhutan. At large, SHINE adopts the two-way strategy: to vitalize tourism in eastern and central Bhutan, where the handicraft and agro- products are made; and conversely, to bring these products into the supply chain of the mainstream tourism.

The project was initiated by the Centre for Appropriate Technology (GrAT, Austria) and kicked off in May 2020 in partnership with the Handicrafts Association of Bhutan (HAB), Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE), and STENUM Asia in India.

The project engages native producers - individuals and groups in the tourism value chain, links their products and services to the tourism hubs, and uses Appropriate Technology (AT) to increase production quality and quantity. SHINE’s various interventions include product diversification, quality and quantity improvement of handicrafts and agri-products, integrating indigenous attractions in tour products, and propagating and replicating the results. The beneficiary groups of the project are rural producers, craftsmen, hoteliers, village homestays, agro-producers, craft and agro-enterprises, women entrepreneurs, informal self-help groups, disadvantaged youth and the local communities. Through the multi-dimensional interventions, producers not only acquire better skills, but are also able to market their products more successfully. HAB and BAOWE also receive assistance in terms of skills development and capacity building. These agencies are active in helping the vulnerable and neglected players in the value chain. This volume of tourism attraction books is one vital step towards promoting the eastern and southern districts in Bhutan as attractive tourism destinations.

On behalf of the entire SHINE team, I would like to invite you to discover the exciting and diverse attractions presented in this first edition of our books, and wish you use this resource collection together with the local stakeholders for a joint and inclusive development.

Dr. Robert Wimmer
Lead Project Manager of the SHINE project
Managing Director, Center for Appropriate Technology (GrAT) Austria



Sustainable Hospitality Industry
Inclusive of Native Entrepreneurs

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White water rafting in Zhemgang



Introduction

The uneven distribution of tourism benefits in Bhutan is one of the pressing concerns that the EU-funded SWITCH-Asia project SHINE (Sustainable Hospitality Industry Inclusive of Native Entrepreneurs) is addressing. The project's seven target districts - Zhemgang, Dagana, Lhuentse, Mongar, Trashigang and Pemagatshel - are far-flung districts with challenging accessibility by both road and air. An overwhelming majority of tourists visit only the western region, which resulted in heavy dependence on imported products such as handicrafts and agri-food to serve them while leaving behind the valuable and diverse traditional foods and rural crafts from the eastern and central districts. If more tourists travel to the rural areas to experience natural aspect of Bhutan, or if the resources in the East and central are effectively mobilized to cover the high demand of tourists in the current tourism hotspots, local producers can improve their community livelihood and enhance the distribution of tourism values across the country. These seven districts have an enormous potential to attract tourists. Each is unique in itself. Every valley resounds with myths and tales from the past, and every village has its own folk traditions and customs. Their rituals, festivals, and social mores still retain that native originality and splendor. The way they work on their ancient farmlands, the food they consume, the community in which they thrive, and almost all other aspects of their lives are largely unsullied by modernization and external influences. To top it all, surrounding their homes and villages are pristine forests inhabited by a plethora of wildlife.

This volume of tourism attraction books is therefore an attempt to build an inventory of tourism resources in these seven districts by delving into every aspect of rural life including crops and forest products, history, culture, craft, monasteries and religious sites, folk life, etc. Various products deemed interesting for tourists to see, taste and listen to, are introduced. The volume consists of eight books: one presenting the agri-products and non-timber forest products, as well as traditional sports and cultural activities, which are commonly encountered and practiced in the region; each of the other seven books is dedicated to each target district with specific monasteries and stupas, unique festivals and myths, and available accommodation options. Two sample itineraries per district are proposed to explore the uncharted Bhutan.

As a whole, this inventory will help policymakers and respective districts to develop sustainable and inclusive tourism models with the rich resources, tour operators and guides pick up the momentum of thriving rural eco-tourism trends of the world, and many producers along the tourism value chain to find the new opportunities for income generation by supplying cash crops, authentic handicraft, and village homestays with standard quality.

This is the first edition, and the SHINE project team hopes to receive feedback from readers, including potential stakeholders of the new sustainable tourism models, to verify and enhance the inventory, and tourists who are interested in exploring real Bhutan.

About the Dzongkhag

Zhemgang is one of the richest Dzongkhags in Bhutan in terms of natural resources, culture and wildlife. With a population of 17,110 in its eight gewogs and a Dungkhag, the Dzongkhag forms part of three national parks - Royal Manas National Park, Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, and Phrumsengla National Park – with a wildlife corridor cutting right through it.

Historically, the district is known as Khengrig-Nam-Sum or the three agro-ecological zones - Upper Kheng covering Bardo and Shingkharg with high altitude areas, Middle Kheng covering Nangkhor and Trong with mid altitude areas and Lower Kheng covering Phangkhar, Goshing, Ngangla and Bjoka with mid-low altitude areas. The people of Zhemgang chiefly cultivate maize followed by rice, buckwheat, millet, barley, wheat, foxtail millet, potato, etc. Oranges and cardamom are the main source of cash income for the southern and central regions while the northern regions depend mainly on livestock products.

The district is considered to be one of the last bastions of ancient Bon (animist) religious practices. The communities here are also well-known for their rich culture, particularly folk songs and dances, while their skill in bamboo and cane craft is second to none. Their cane products such as Bangchungs (matted bamboo bowls), Palangs (alcohol containers), Belo (hats), mats and boxes are sold all over Bhutan and beyond. They are also adept potters and their earthenware products were highly prized throughout the country in the past.

Zhemgang is also dotted with religious monuments, both ancient and modern. The famous ones such as Buli Lhakhang and Tharpa Choeling Lhakhang were built by Tertön Pema Lingpa, an exalted revealer of religious treasures of Guru Rinpoche.

The Manas National Park is considered a conservation showpiece with a biodiversity that includes hundreds of rare animal and plant species such as Golden Langurs and the Asian One-horned Rhinoceros. It is the only nature park in the world where six species of wild felids – golden cat, marbled cat, leopard cat, clouded leopard, common leopard and tiger - are found sharing the same habitat.

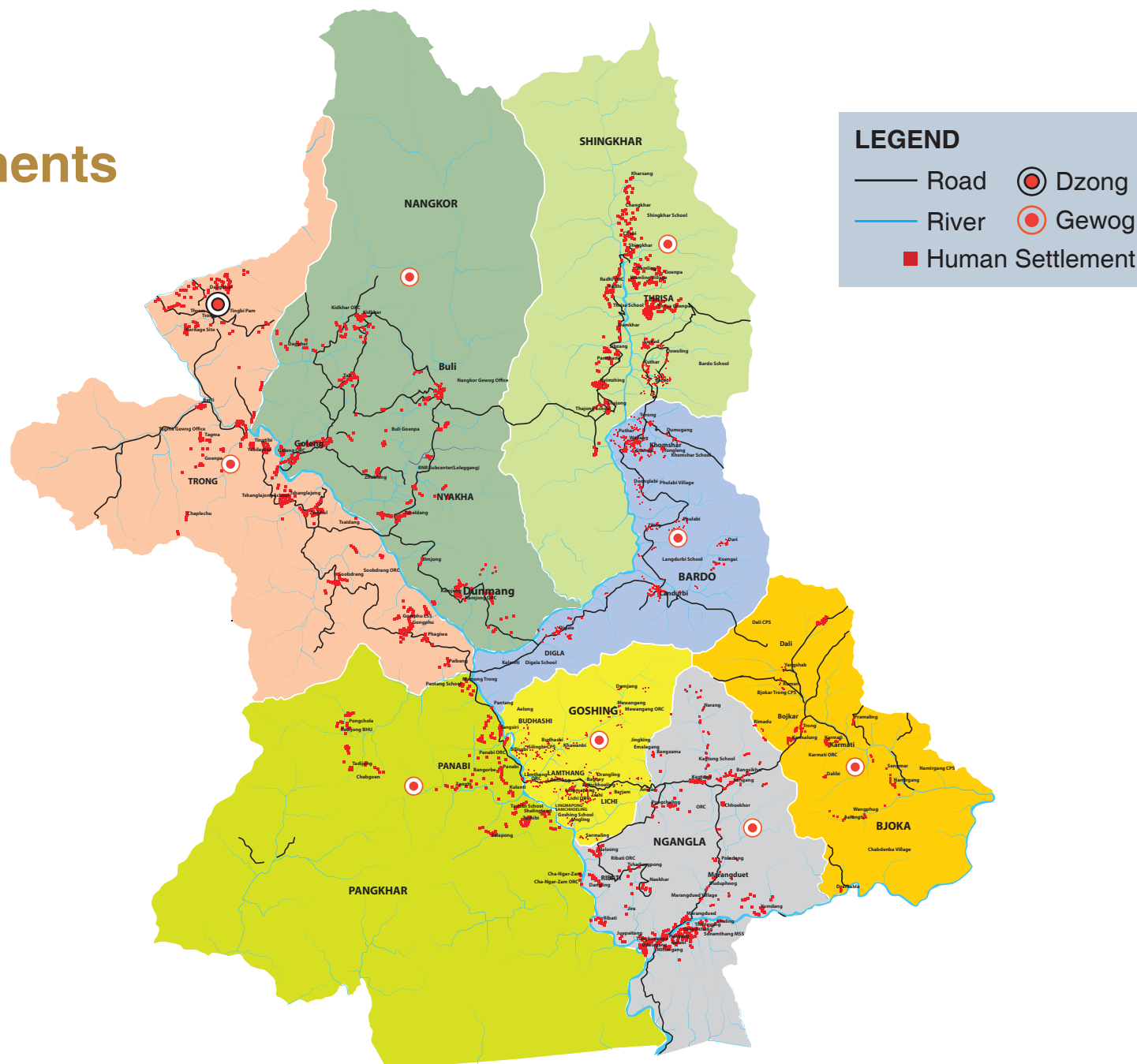
ZHEMGANG AT A GLANCE

National Statistical Bureau	2021	EDUCATION	
Area (sq. km)	2421.74	Tertiary Institute under RUB	0
Altitude (masl).	100-4500	Central Schools	4
Dungkhag	1	Higher Secondary Schools	2
Gewogs	8	Middle Secondary Schools	2
Chiwogs	40	AGRICULTURE	
Villages	153	Dry land (acres)	3,251
Gungtong	126	Wet land (acres)	640
		Orchard (acres)	211
POPULATION		INFRASTRUCTURE	
Total	17,110	Roads (Kms)	966.99
Population density (per sq. km)	7.07	Electricity Coverage (%)	100
HEALTH		Telephone Connections (Nos)	265
Hospitals	3	Internet Connections (Nos)	90
Indigenous Units	4	Religious Institutions	9
Basic Health Units (BHUs)	15	Religious Monuments	405
		No of tourists visited (2019)	58
Rural water supply coverage (%)	95		

DISTANCE BY ROAD

From	To	Distance	Duration	From	To	Distance	Duration
Paro	Thimphu	54 kms	1.5 hrs	Gongphu	Panbang	40km	1.5 hrs
Thimphu	Wangdi	70 kms	2 hrs	Pangbang	Core Manas	11km	40 mins
Wangdi	Trongsa	129 kms	3.5 hrs	Pangbang	Bjoka	25km	2 hrs
Trongsa	Zhemgang	111 kms	3 hrs	Tingtibi	Bulli	51km	2 hrs
Wangdi	Tsirang	103 kms	3 hrs	Bulli	Shingkharg	64km	4 hrs
Tsirang	Gelephu	93 kms	2.5 hrs	Shingkharg	Bardo	30km	1.5 hrs
Gelephu	Zhemgang	133 kms	4 hrs	Khomshar	Rindibi	53km	4 hrs
Bumthang	Zhemgang	179 kms	5 hrs	Pangbang	Nganglam	55km	1.5 hrs
Zhemgang	Tingtibi	35 kms	1 hr	Gelephu	Guwahati	255km	6 hrs
Tingtibi	Gongphu	45 kms	1.5 hr				

Map of human settlements



WHITE-BELLIED HERON



Bird watching, Excursion in MNP, Dip in hot spring



March - April,
September - October



400 - 2000m



Warm & pleasant



Moderate



7 Nights 8 Days

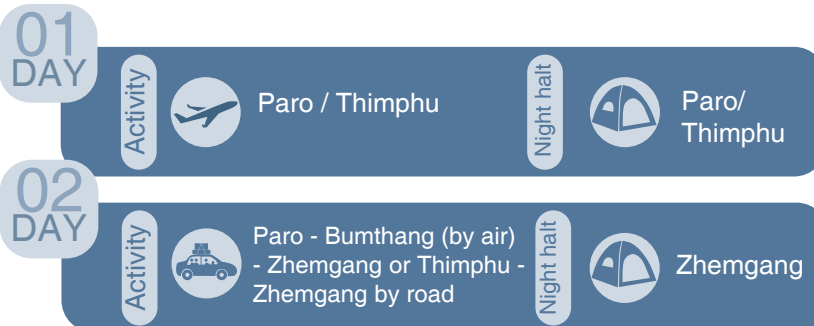
Bhutan has a little over 30 white-bellied herons (*Ardea Insignis*) while its global population is roughly 200, making the bird among the rarest on earth, thus critically endangered.

Punatshangchu basin is the bird's key habitat in Bhutan but it has also been sighted in Berti, Zhemgang. The herons follow a unique courtship, usually between January and February, where they chase each other playfully with sticks, catch fish, bask in the sun and call out to partners.

This tour goes all the way from north-west Zhemgang to Panbang in the south which borders the Indian plains. There are great opportunities to see innumerable birds, mammals, butterflies and orchids while also passing through a typical villages dotted with ancient fortresses and monasteries.

One can also interact with local communities and partake in their rural lifestyle. Trying local foods prepared from bamboo shoot, wild yam and other wild plants, and local drink like Tongpa, distilled from millet, will add to the unique experience.

The Manas National park, the only sanctuary globally to have six different cat species in one habitat, is perhaps the key attraction of the tour. One can indulge in white water rafting or an excursion in the park and hopefully get to see wildlife like the endangered Bengal Tiger, Asiatic Elephant, One-horned Rhino, Water Buffalo or the Golden Langur.





KHARPHU FESTIVAL TOUR



Culture & traditions



March/June



600 - 2000m



Warm & moist



Moderate



8 Nights 9 Days

The Kharphu is a Bon ritual which has existed before the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan. Kharphu ritual is celebrated in central and eastern Bhutan in various forms at different times.

It is difficult to trace the origin of the Kharphu ritual. The Bonpo (Bon priest) performs the ritual, and it is believed that Bonpo goes into a trance and takes a shamanic journey to Central Tibet to invite Lha Ode Gungyel. The Bonpo invites the Lha (god) by reciting

the ancient routes from central Tibet to Shingkhar village via Monla Karchung (Mountain pass) to Bumthang, and then to Shingkhar. The Bonpo and his assistants make the offerings by singing verses called Ahoi (Kharphu ritual verses). Thus, by propitiating Lha Ode Gungyel, people believe that their community will be blessed with prosperity, good health, bumper harvest, timely rainfall, and an increase in the number of cattle and other livestock.

01 DAY	Activity		Paro/Thimphu	Night halt		Paro/Thimphu
02 DAY	Activity		Paro - Bumthang (by air) - Zhemgang or Thimphu - Zhemgang by road	Night halt		Tingtibi / Zhemgang
03 DAY	Activity		Zhemgang - Shingkhar Gewog	Night halt		VHS in Shingkhar

04 DAY	Activity		Participate in local festival	Night halt		VHS, Shingkhar
05 DAY	Activity		Shingkhar - Bardo: Bardo festival	Night halt		VHS, Bardo
06 DAY	Activity		Sightseeing & hiking in Bardo	Night halt		VHS, Bardo
07 DAY	Activity		Bardo to Tingtibi	Night halt		Tingtibi
08 DAY	Activity		Tingtibi to Gelephu/Thimphu	Night halt		Gelephu/Thimphu
09 DAY	Activity		Exit from Paro/Gelephu			



The picturesque Buli heritage village is famous for the Buli Manmo Tsho (lake) and a temple founded by the great “Treasure Revealer” Pema Lingpa





Photo Courtesy: jeninbhatan.wordpress.com

HISTORY & CULTURE

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Cultural Map of Zhemgang



A farmhouse in Ngangla Trong



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Inside Bhutan



Historical Sites & Heritage



Photo Courtesy: kuenselonline.com

ZHEMGANG DZONG

The name “Zhemgang” is derived from Zhang Gang, which means, “Lama Zhang’s hill”. Lama Zhang Dorje Drakpa, a great Buddhist master from Tibet, is said to have built a hermitage at the site of the present Dzong in 1163. In 1655, the Dzong in its present form, standing on top of a ridge that rises sharply from the Mangdechhu facing the village of Trong, was built, symbolizing the unification of the three historical divisions of Kheng-Kheng chekor, Namkor, and Bardo. The Dzong was renovated by the third king of Bhutan in 1963 cementing its status as the most significant and one of the oldest religious structures in the district. There are six temples inside the Dzong, of which the most sacred is the Goenkhang (inner sanctum) believed to have been built by Lama Zhang himself. Another significant temple is the Naib Lhakhang which is dedicated to Dorji Rabten, the deity who safeguards the Dzong.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Prime Minister's Office – PMO, Bhutan

HOUSE OF BJOKA

The Bjoka Khoche was a powerful chieftain in the village of Bjoka in lower Kheng. He lived in a large stone mansion which is believed to be almost 800 years old. The house has a peculiar architecture: some portions of the masonry wall are built of stone slabs that are not only smaller than the rest but are also dark in colour. Historians say that this unusual characteristic proves that Assamese people from the provinces of Kokabari, Rangapani and Gohali were engaged in the construction alongside Bhutanese, resulting in the two distinct architectural features. Naktshang, locally known as ‘the manor house’ is also distinct from other houses in the region. As it was the norm in the olden days, the houses in lower Kheng were built with timber stilts and used matted bamboo for wall and wild herbaceous plants, and banana leaves for roof. The Bjoka Khoche exercised authority over the Kheng region along with parts of Assam in India, and neighbouring Pemagatshel and Mongar dzongkhags.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: bhutanculturalatlas.clcs.edu.bt



Photo Courtesy: bhutanculturalatlas.clcs.edu.bt



Photo Courtesy: bhutanculturalatlas.clcs.edu.bt

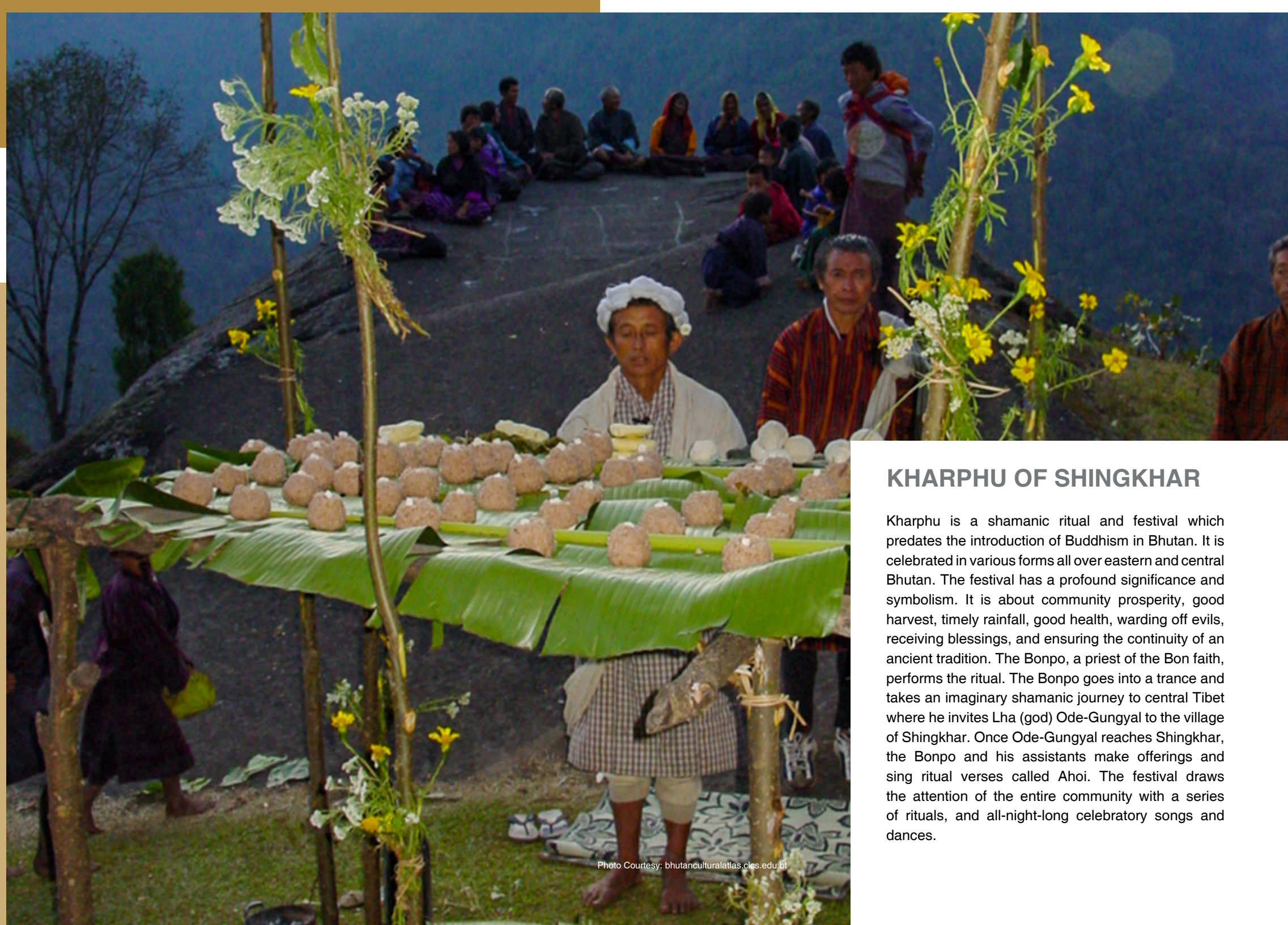
TRONG HERITAGE VILLAGE

Trong is located on a hill that overlooks the majestic Zhemgang Dzong. A cobblestone footpath runs horizontally through the 27-household village. Local people claim that the name of the Trong village is derived from their local dialect Krong. Khengpas call Krong for the village, however, some experts historians claim that Lama Zhang, a Buddhist master who founded Zhemgang Dzong, was assassinated in Trong and the name of the village was known after the incident. Trong is a common respect word for assassination in Bhutan.

The houses in Trong are mostly two-storeyed and built of traditional mud-plastered stone masonry with wooden windows and shutters. The striking feature of the houses is their resistance to earthquakes despite having been built on rocks without proper foundation. Due to a shortage of digging tools in the past, the depth of the foundation does not exceed 30 cm . While some of the houses have retained their original architecture, many have fallen into disrepair and are now little more than ruins. In 2014, the 5th King of Bhutan visited these houses and was impressed by the remarkable masonry work. The king instructed that Trong would be preserved as a heritage village.



Festivals



KHARPHU OF SHINGKHAR

Kharphe is a shamanic ritual and festival which predates the introduction of Buddhism in Bhutan. It is celebrated in various forms all over eastern and central Bhutan. The festival has a profound significance and symbolism. It is about community prosperity, good harvest, timely rainfall, good health, warding off evils, receiving blessings, and ensuring the continuity of an ancient tradition. The Bonpo, a priest of the Bon faith, performs the ritual. The Bonpo goes into a trance and takes an imaginary shamanic journey to central Tibet where he invites Lha (god) Ode-Gungyal to the village of Shingkar. Once Ode-Gungyal reaches Shingkar, the Bonpo and his assistants make offerings and sing ritual verses called Ahoi. The festival draws the attention of the entire community with a series of rituals, and all-night-long celebratory songs and dances.

Photo Courtesy: bhutanculturalatlas.cles.edu.bt



Photo Courtesy: dzkuensel.com

GUNG LHA

Gung Lha is a shamanic ritual which invokes the sky god, Ode-Gungyal, to protect village communities and bring good fortune and prosperity with offerings of feast, libation and purification. During this ritual, every member of the community prays to Ode-Gungyal. It is a tradition that dates back to prehistoric Bhutan.

In Buli village, this ritual is known as Buli Chodpa and is practiced by all the 94 households. It is held on the 15th day of the 10th month of the lunar calendar. Relatives from far and near come to chant prayers and worship, believing that a misfortune would befall if they are absent during the ritual. However, pregnant women and their spouses do not participate because of the belief that the new-born will be either deformed or disabled. Unlike the norm in the past, the ritual does not involve animal sacrifice.

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Photo Courtesy: geodiscoverytours.com

ZHEMGANG TSHECHU

Zhemgang Tshechu is celebrated annually between March and April, and involves a three-day program of mask and folk dances culminating with the unfurling of the Guru Thongdroel, a large appliqué painting, depicting the 8th century Buddhist master, Guru Padmasambhava. This festival's primary attraction is said to cleanse negative karma and accumulate good merit for those who see it. The festival is the biggest of its kind in the district and is an occasion where the rural communities take a brief respite from their daily chores to partake in the celebrations by mingling with family members, friends and acquaintances. People come dressed in their finest traditional costume and bring along special food and drinks to be consumed at the festival's venue at Zhemgang Dzong. The festival gives an opportunity to tour the district which is famous for the hot spring at Duenmang, the Royal Manas National Park, and get indulged in exciting mix of local customs and traditions.



Photo Courtesy: bhutan.travel

BON-CHOE OF TRONG

Once a year, during the months of November and December, the residents of Trong village perform this ritual to appease the local deities and spirits. The deities invoked during Bon rites are said to live in mountains, valleys, lakes, forests, streams, and cliffs, and their intervention is sought to ensure a plentiful harvest and protect the surrounding people from plagues, misfortune, and ailments. Bonism arrived in Bhutan from Tibet and flourished before the arrival of Buddhism in the 8th century.

This ritual begins in the morning with the burning of incense, which is a sign of environmental cleansing or purification. After that, the deities and spirits are summoned and Tshog (feast) is served, which includes a variety of foods, drinks, fruits, grains, and other goods. There are also mask dances and local folk tunes performed. Similar rites are held in many villages across Zhemgang.



Nye (Sacred sites)

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Photo Courtesy: Fb, Norbu Wangdi

TINGKAR NYE

Tingkar Nye is an hour's walk from Shingkar Gewog centre. It is also referred as Beyul Tingkara. According to local folklore, Guru Rinpoche opened the doors to this sacred site. The Nye has a temple built at the base of a huge rock overlooking the Chamkharchu River. Nearby is a big cave with four entrances which are known as the "doorways of the four cardinal directions". In 1897, an earthquake destroyed the temple but the rocks that hang precariously from the cliff at the site were miraculously left intact. It is believed that these rocks bless barren couples with children. A spherical-shaped rock is believed to bless couples with boys, while the triangular one grants girls. To solicit the blessing, the couple must carry the rock around the temple 108 times.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Bhutan History

LO-NGA NYE

Guru Padmasambhava meditated at Lo-Nga Nye for five years with his consort Khandro Monmo Tashi Khedron, the daughter of Hami Rao who was the king of Khoma in Kurtoe valley. The local people consider Lo-Nga Nye second to Paro Taktshang in terms of sanctity. It is situated high on the mountain between Khomshar and Bardo village, about a two-hour journey uphill from the road. This Nye is known for the extraordinary healing power of its two medicinal spring waters. One, known as Guru Drupchu, which is said to have gushed out from the spot where Guru Padmasambhava urinated while the other is believed to have emerged from the genital of Dakini Dorji Phagmo. Devotees drink the spring waters to heal internal and external wounds, cough, skin diseases, joint pain, back pain, goiter, and other impurities. Guru Rinpoche has left behind several body imprints on rocks within the Nye. A letter "HA" inscribed on a rock wall symbolizes Guru's spiritual realization. The cave where he mediated is known as Guru Draphu or Hung Chen Drak. An imprint of a sword of Jampelyang (Bodhisattva of Wisdom) is engraved on the cave wall.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Norbu Wangdi

PAWANGLA NYE

Located in Lamtang village of Goshing gewog, this Nye is believed to have existed from time immemorial but was discovered as a sacred site only in the twentieth century. The Nye derived its name from the striped white bats (Pawang in Kheng dialect) which inhabit the caves in the vicinity. It is believed that Manmo (nine-headed local deity) who is half snake and half human, meditated inside one of the caves and attained enlightenment. Two other indigenous deities, Dongdongbara Nagpo (man) and Pawangla Singyerepa (female) also live in these caves. The male deity has a horn with a half-black, half-white face, whilst the female deity wears a tiara. A stupa known as Termapong chorten is located in the Nye area and is said to house sacred treasures of incomparable significance. The adjacent villages of Lamtang, Trong, Wangling, and Khawangbi can all be seen from Pawangla Nye.

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Photo Courtesy: simplelifedarlinguwho.blogspot.com

BULI TSHO

Buli Tsho is a lake shrouded in mystery located in the heart of a thick forest in the village of Buli which is around five kilometer south of the Gewog center at Nangkhon. The lake is the abode of Tshomen (mermaid) Kuntu Zangmo, the deity of the village, who not only safeguards the local people from misfortune, illness, and famine but also blesses them with peace and prosperity. The legend of Buli Tsho goes back to the 17th century. Tshomen Kuntu Zangmo is believed to have followed her brother, who later became the Buli Ponpo (chieftain), to Bhutan from their ancestral home in Tibet. Upon arrival in Buli, she is said to have sought shelter from an old woman who was gracious enough to put her up in the family's altar room. That night the old woman peeped through a hole and saw a large snake instead of the young woman. The next morning, the young woman was nowhere to be seen but, strangely, a butter churner had been left behind. After this incident, the old woman, owing to the mermaid's blessing, is said to have become very rich. Every year, the residents of Buli perform rites to appease the mermaid deity.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sangay Wangchuk

TUNGLABI TSHO

The local people believe that Tunglabi Tsho is the soul lake (Latsho) of Guru Rinpoche. It is said to have formed during the Guru's first visit to Bhutan in the 8th century. The lake sits in the middle of paddy field surrounded by cliffs on two sides in the deserted village of Tunglabi, Bardo gewog which is around 87 kilometers away from Zhemgang town. According to legend, the settlement in Tunglabi had a cow herder. When his cows went to drink water, they frequently drowned in the lake. The cow herder thought the water was bad. So he planted weeds around the lake to make it smaller, and the lake shrank in size as a result.



Photo Courtesy: Cultures of Bhutan - Loden Foundation

TALI TSHO

Tali Tsho, alias Tali Tangsibi Tsho, is revered by the people of Tali. The lake is closely associated with Buli Manmo, the female lake deity of Buli. It is said that when Buli Manmo was travelling from Tibet to Bhutan, she took a rest on the top of a ridge at Tali, at a place called Dharpa Tang. When she continued her journey from Dharpa Tang to Buli, she forgot to take her Baykur (basket) which she had brought along. This baykur is supposed to have turned into a lake and ushered prosperity for the village as there was plenty of water to irrigate rice fields. After this incident, the lake was aptly described as the “Jewel Basket of Tali”. It is believed that the women of Tali are beautiful and the men successful due to the blessings of the lake. However, as time passed, the lake began to shrink and now conservation initiatives are underway to revive it.



Lelagang twin-waterfall on the Gomphu-Panbang highway

Photo Courtesy: Chorten Dorji, ED, HAB



Monasteries & Stupas



Photo Courtesy: Fb, HeavenlyBhutan

TALI DRATSHANG

The temple's founder, Geshe Pema Thinley, is said to have envisioned Tali Dratshang as a structure resembling Zangtopelri, the Copper-Coloured Mountain Palace of Guru Padmasambhava. Tali Dratshang is located on a mountain slope overlooking the Tali village, about two and half hours' drive from Zhemgang town. The foundation for Tali Dratshang was laid in 1962 with the construction of a small temple. After Geshe Pema Thinley's demise, a bigger structure on the site of the old temple was built by Lama Therchong and consecrated in 1974 by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. In 1990, the temple was upgraded to the present Zangtopelri and further enlarged in 1992 by the 70th Je Khenpo of Bhutan, Trulku Jigme Choda. The centrepiece of the Dratshang is an enormous statue of Chukchi Zhey (eleven-faced Avalokitesvara) that spans through all the three floors of the structure.



Photo Courtesy: tourism.gov.bt

BULI DECHEN CHOLING

Buli Dechencholing temple is located at the heart of Buli village in Nangkor gewog, 60 kilometres east of Zhemgang town. It was founded by the great treasure-discoverer Terton Dorje Lingpa (1346-1405). A legend goes that Dorje Lingpa had a vision of Vairocana (cosmic buddha) who directed him to travel to the south of Tibet. As he followed his dream, he reached Bhutan in 1370 where he visited many places and revealed many treasures until he returned to Tibet in 1376. Buli temple was founded during this visit to Bhutan. 22 silver bowls, a pair of golden cymbals, and ten golden statues are among the temple's valuables. These golden statues were owned by a private citizen, but a series of calamities struck his family, which was interpreted as a sign from the gods that the statues should be kept within the temple grounds. Among many festivals conducted at the Lhakhang are the wild potato festival and Chodpa which is the main ritual of the Kheng region.

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Photo Courtesy: commons.wikimedia.org

NGANGLA TRONG LHAKHANG

The date of the construction of Ngangla Trong Lhakhang is not known but it is considered the most significant temple of the Ngangla community. Located on top of a gentle hill, it is the first temple that is visible from the road as one enters Ngangla village. The community road that leads up to the temple connects Panbang town to Ngangla and Bjoka gewogs. The temple is made of stone, mud, and wood, and it is a typical structure. Its three-tiered ceiling features a gilded pinnacle. The major religious activities conducted annually in the Lhakhang are Sertam, Derchode, Gyedpa Tshechu and Chodepala, which are carried out by the lay practitioners.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Gi Nye

PANTHANG LHAKHANG

This Lhakhang was built by the people of Panthang to serve as a place of worship and to host religious, cultural, and social gatherings, as they did not have any. It is located at the end of a low-lying plain next to a river and it is surrounded by agricultural fields to the south, a few traditional houses to the east, and a small orange orchard to the north. The main altar of the Lhakhang is made of wood. Guru Rinpoche and his two consorts are among the many statues on display. Guru Tshengye (Padmasambhava's eight forms), Tshelha Namsum (the three Bodhisattavas of Longevity), and the Zhabdrung are seen in the wall paintings.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sangay Wangchuk

PHUMEDTHANG DRATSHANG

The Lhakhang sits on a hill that resembles a Mandala offering in Nimshong village in Shingkar Gewog. On the command of the first king of Bhutan, Lama Yeshe, the founder of Nimshong village, initiated the construction of this temple. It is said that the temple was also built as a Kha-Nen (protection) against tigers roaming around Nimshong village. The statues of Palden Lhamo (Mahakali), Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara), and Pel Yeshe Goenpo (Mahakala) are the main relics of the temple. Palden Lhamo's golden statue was placed in 2001, and the Lhakhang has subsequently been declared as the deity's "residence palace" by Bhutan's 70th Je Khenpo.. An ancient avocado tree growing at the temple premises is believed to contain Ter (sacred treasure teachings) while its five branches symbolize Tshering Chenga (the Five Sisters of Longevity). Today, the temple functions both as a Shedra (monastic school) and Dratshang (temple of the clergy).



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sangay Wangchuk

TAGMA GOENPA

This 16th century monastery sprawls on a hilltop which resembles the head of an elephant at Tagma village facing the Black Mountain range, about 56 kilometres south of Zhemgang Dzong. It is believed that the monastery was built by Terton Pema Lingpa who dedicated it to the deity Palden Lhamo in order to protect the villagers from wild animals like tigers and elephants which roamed in the wilderness nearby. Tagma village is named after local people saw a tigress giving birth to a cub when Terton Pema Lingpa's Kudung (physical remains) was brought from Tamzhing in Bumthang to Tagma monastery. Another version of the story has it that the village was named after an Assamese saint visited the locality and tamed a tigress which used to kill people.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: google.com/NyakharLhakhang

NYAKHAR LHAKHANG

This Lhakhang is located about 55 kilometres from proper Zhemgang. The Lhakhang is thought to have gotten its name after people presented Lama Zhang (a great Buddhist master from Tibet) some wild asparagus, after which he named the village Nyakhar (the village of asparagus).

Nyakhar was ruled by the Nyakhar Dung, an aristocratic family during that time. This family requested Lama Zhang to construct a temple in the village.

To seek divination, Lama Zhang threw a pair of cymbals in the air from a place called Lhaipong. At first the cymbals landed at the bottom of the village but they swirled again and landed at the heart of the village. This was thought to be a favorable omen; therefore, a temple was constructed there.

The Nyakhar Dung family offered the temple with 13 gold statues and a golden scripture text after it was completed.

These relics are still kept in the temple today, but they are not on show for the public.



Photo Courtesy: bhutanculturalatlas.clcs.edu.bt

MONMO TOKTO LHAKHANG

Monmo Tokto Lhakhang was built in honour of Monmo Tashi Khedron who was one of the five consorts of Guru Padmasambhava and the daughter of Hami Rao, the king of Khoma in Kurtoe valley. Monmo Tashi Khedron was instructed to go to the Mon area of Kheng Kikhar by Guru Rinpoche, while he was meditating at Jambay Lhakhang in Bumthang. She travelled to Kheng and meditated for several months in a small cave in Kikhar. Monmo Tokto Lhakhang is said to be built on a massive chunk of sacred rock blessed by Monmo Tashi Khedron. Treasure hunters (unknown) are thought to have recovered a pair of sacred conch shells from a large rock beneath the temple. One of the conch shells is reported to have flown to Kurtoe Dungkar, while the other is kept at Jang Ponpo's former mansion.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Gi Nye

OGYEN CHOLING ZANGDOPELRI

The temple is located in Ogyen Choling village, about three kilometres from Bardo gewog, and is known to host several sacred sites in its vicinity. Towards the northwest, one can view the Kurje (body imprint) of Guru Rinpoche and his Uzha (hat) embedded on a rock. Further, there are several rocks strewn across the site, which are believed to have imprints of self-arisen images of sun and moon (Nima-Dawa Rang-jon), and one hundred self-arisen sacred letter “AH” (AH Ja). To the temple’s north are two Drupchhus (holy spring waters) dedicated to Guru Rinpoche and a Dakini. Guru’s Chagkarje (imprint of Guru’s walking stick), Guru Latsho (soul-lake of the Guru) and an imprint of Khandro’s Tangti (Dakini’s drum) are amongst the sacred imprints that can be seen etched on the rocks. There are rock-imprints of a Dakini’s hat, Dungkar Rangjon (naturally arisen conch), Zhabje (footprint) and a Zhabpe (knee print) of Khenpo Thubtan towards the temple’s east.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Gi Nye

ZURPHEL LHAKHANG

Located in Zurphel village in Trong Gewog, this temple is also called Zurboe or Beyul, meaning the hidden land. In the 8th century when Guru Rinpoche was at Tang Ugyen Drak, he foretold a Beyul in Zurphel. Local lore claim that an eon ago, a cow herder while in the lookout for his strayed cattles, heard an enchanting music emanating from a hut. As he entered the hut, he reached an unfamiliar place and a feeling of overwhelming joy and peace overpowered him. After about a week he found himself sitting on a rock next to his hut, which now looks old and dilapidated. When he went back to his home, he was appalled to discover that all his family members had died and his house was falling apart. This extraordinary episode is believed to be a testimony that Zurphel indeed was a Beyul, and that the man had just happened to stumble upon it. Locals say that the temple was built by Trulku Chorten Gonpo, son of Terton Dorji Lingpa. King Songtsen Gambois also believed to have built 108 temples in a day and Zurphel was one of them. The main relic of the temple is a statue with unique features of Guru crafted by the founder.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: wainando.de

JATSHABI LHAKHANG

Jatshabi Lhakhang is a privately owned two-storey temple in the tiny village of Jatshabi in Shingkhar gewog, built by a Buddhist teacher called Lama Kelzang. The temple is known for its beautiful fresco of Guru Tshengye (the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche), Oepamey (Buddha Amitabha), Gyalwa Rig Nga (the five wisdom buddha) and Chukchizhay (11-faced Avalokitesvara). It also has statues of the Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. The villagers seek protection from the guardian deity of Jatshabi lhakhang and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali), in times of sickness and misfortune. The temple is also the centre for the community's social and cultural activities.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Kesang Choden

GONGPHU LHAKHANG

Gongphu Lhakhang, built by Lama Shakya Ozer, is considered one of the oldest temples in the region although the date of its construction is unknown. It is located in Gongphu village in Trong Gewog, about 45 kilometres from Tingtibi town. Locals believe that, there is a lake beneath the temple, as evidenced by remnants of water at the four corners of the Lhakhang's base walls. The origin of the term "Gongphu" can be traced back to two different stories. According to one narrative, the settlement's name was "Gomphu" ("gom" meaning meditation, while "phu" denotes higher ground), an interpretation of the fact that the village harbours a cave where Guru Rinpoche had meditated. The other version states that there once was a dumb man in Chakharbi village who always wandered into the wild and returned home with cane shoots. When the villagers questioned him of his strange adventure, he would always point to a hill facing upward indicating that he brought the canes from Gong (in Khengkha, gong means high or above). From then, the villagers called the place Gongphu or the "high ridge."



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sonam Y Pem

SONAM CHOLING DRATSHANG

The religious and spiritual nucleus of the local community, Sonam Choling Monastic School, is about two kilometres away from Panbang town. The Dratshang(Temple) came to fruition out of love and empathy as it was constructed from numerous private donations and voluntary labour services rendered by the locals. Inside this temple are the portraits of the eight manifestations of Padmasambhava and Dewachen. The main relics in the monastery are the life-sized statues of the Buddha and Zhabdrung, both painted in gold, and encased in a glass-box.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Bhutan "Happiness is a Place".

GOSHING TRONG LHAKHANG

Goshing Trong Lhakhang in Lamtang village was established in 1913, to counteract the growing influence of bon and shamanic beliefs among the Gewog people. This Lhakhang serves as a nodal point for the four Gewogs of Phangkhar, Goshing, Nangla and Bjoka, and is located about eight kilometres from Pantang on the Tingtibi-Panbang highway. The construction of the Lhakhang was also envisaged to help contain leprosy, a dreaded disease that ruined the lives of many in the community. While most relics in Bhutanese Lhakhangs are made of precious metals, Goshing Lhakhang's main artifact is a statue of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal carved out of sandalwood.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Ge Nye

DHANGKHAR LHAKHANG

Dhangkhar Lhakhang is one of the oldest temples in Trong Gewog. The two-storey Lhakhang is located seven kilometres south of Zhemgang Dzong. It is said that in the mid-8th century, when Guru Rinpoche visited Dhangkhar on his return from Ugyen Drak in Nabji after settling the dispute between king Nawche and Sindhu Raja, he left his footprint on a rock near the temple. The village was named Dhangkhar, meaning the “luminous province” in Khengkha, as it is said that the early morning rays of the sun falls straight onto the village dispelling the darkness. The sacred objects in the temple include a statue of Guru Nangsi Zilnon, flanked by statues of Zhabdrung and the historical Shakyamuni Buddha.



Photo Courtesy: bhutanculturalatlas.clcs.edu.bt

WADANG LHAKHANG

According to legend, a group of Tibetans came to Bhutan to build the Wadang temple after receiving spiritual guidance and fulfilling a prophecy. Wadang Lhakhang was constructed at the same time as the Samye monastery in Tibet built by the Tibetan Dharma King Trisong Deutsen in the 8th century. The Lhakhang is located in the centre of Wadang village, half a kilometre below Bardo Gewog centre, and approximately 65 Kilometres from Kheng Buli.

The Lhakhang was initially called Wodog Lhakhang, meaning “the stone beneath”, implying the unique stones resembling turquoises that were laid as flooring inside the temple. The temple was damaged by fire in 1979 and abandoned for nearly 16 years. After the temple’s downfall, the community suffered numerous misfortunes and illness following which they sought divine intervention and learnt that the ordeals were caused due to the negligence of the temple. Thus, the community renovated the temple in 1995.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, MAMUNG TRONG LHAKHANG

MAMUNG TRONG LHAKHANG

This Lhakhangin Mamung village in Phangkhar Gewog was built to contain leprosy which was once widespread in that area, and also to provide a venue for the local community to perform religious functions. It is located about 6 kilometres from Pantang on a farm road towards Pongchola.

The temple's main relics are statues of Choe Long Truel Sum, Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara), Guru Padmasambhava, and the historical Buddha Shakya-muni. The walls inside the temple are also adorned with paintings of Guru Tshengye (Eight manifestation of Guru Rinpoche), Zhabdrung Phuensum Tshogpa and Kunkhyen Lhong Chen Rabjam (14th century). A vivid sketch of the local deity, Ringla Tsen, is also depicted in one corner.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sangay Wangchuk

BJOKA LHAKHANG

Bjoka Lhakhang is believed to have been built around 1637-1638 by Sumthrang Choeje Gyelse Nyodrup Gyeltshen, also known as Nyodrup Gyatso (1610-1666). The Lower Kheng region was then under the religious patronage of the Sumthrang Choeje, a powerful lineage that ruled parts of Kheng Zhemgang and Bumthang. Today, the temple is being looked after by Gangteng Tulku of Nyingma Peling Buddhist tradition. A three-day Bon ritual called AhoiLhasol is performed to appease the local deity besides the annual four-day Chodpa, festival of the community. Among numerous relics, an old mural of Phurpa (Vajrakila) adorns the wall of the main altar room.



Tshachu



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Gi Nye



Photo Courtesy: zhemgang.gov.bt

DUENMANG TSHACHU

Duenmang tshachu (hot spring) is one of the most sacred in the country, located at 200 meters on the floor of a rocky ledge on upper banks of the Mangdechu River. The hot spring has four dipping ponds, each with its own unique temperature and corresponding health benefits and curative aspects. It is said to have been blessed and sanctified by Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century. The hot springs contain ingredients like sulphur and limestone, which according to traditional medicine, are beneficial in numerous ways: The tshachu is known to help cure joint pain, sinusitis, migraine, tuberculosis, urinary tract infections, skin diseases and arthritis. From October to March, people come to the Duenmang hot springs. It is accessible by a 45-minute downhill climb over a steep and narrow mule route that connects the tshachu to Praling village, which is located nearest to the road-point on the Tingtibi-Panbang highway. There is also a public guest house for those who prefer to remain for an extended period of time, albeit it has only the most basic amenities.



Folk Songs



Photo Courtesy: bhutanculturalatlas.clcs.edu.bt

AMAI UGYEN PELZOM

This is a song of sorrow with an underlying message that life has more meaning than being attached to worldly possessions. It is sung in a seated position with a hand placed on the cheek and with a melancholic tonal variation.

It is said that the song was composed by Ugyen Pelzom, a woman from Kheng Gongdue in Mongar. She came as a bride to Kheng Buli but eventually became disillusioned with her mundane life which was associated with suffering. Hence, she abandoned her marriage and the village, and went on to embrace spiritual life. After her renouncement, Ugyen Pelzom travelled to Chhoekhor Toed in Bumthang and meditated at a place called Lugi Rawa where she is believed to have attained enlightenment. The people of Kheng Buli believe her to be a Dakini (angel) because of her devout spiritual conquests.

The song praises the natural elements such as land, trees and lakes, it praises the local deities and the stupa of Kheng Buli, and reminds people to protect these elements and learn to co-exist with them.

The song's verses reflect the values, to abandon mundane lives and seek higher personal goals by embracing spirituality .



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sonam Chopel Trashigangpa

CHILI CHILI BYA CHILI

“Chili ChiliBja Chili” is a folk song composed in praise of a bird called Chilikpa in the local dialect. The local people believe that these birds are harbingers of rainfall and bountiful harvest in parts of lower Zhemgang.

No social or festive occasion is complete without singing this folk song. It is a 13-stanza song, usually sung in Dzongkha. The song describes the character and movement of the bird when it is sighted during the farming season. No one knows the song's origin but its lyrics and intonation highlight the importance of symbiotic relationship and harmony between man and nature. Among the locals, there is a legend about an ancient prince who used to offer charity to a poor youngster. The prince, however, stopped doing this religious gesture and the unfortunate youngster was believed to have been left alone to fend for himself. The boy returned to his farm and sowed millets, but when harvest time arrived, he discovered that the chilikpa had devoured all of the grains. He ensnared the bird out of wrath, but just as he was about to kill it, the bird spoke up and begged for forgiveness. In exchange, the bird promised him good fortune and a plethora of riches.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: folkcloud.com

BOMEYLA KARMAI WANGZOM

Lower Zhemgang's Bomeyla Karmai Wangzom is a vibrant and popular song that highlights rural life of cotton growing. This eight-stanza song was composed by a woman named Karma Wangzom, who struggled to make a living by growing cotton. It is said that a rendition was presented to Zhabdrung Nagwang Namgyal when he first arrived in Bhutan in early 17th century. The song incorporates noises from farm operations such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and spinning cotton to create a vivid picture of rural life..

Cotton is no longer grown in Kheng. However, the communities of lower Zhemgang continue to sing this ancient song with the same zeal and fervour, as it evokes nostalgia for tradition and history.

Berti village with paddy fields in the foreground

Photo Courtesy: norbulingkabhutan.com



View of Goshing village



Photo Courtesy: zhemgang.gov.bt

ACCOMMODATIONS

ACCOMMODATIONS



Panbang Eco-Lodge

Location: Panbang

Capacity: 4 pax

Mobile: +975-17584221



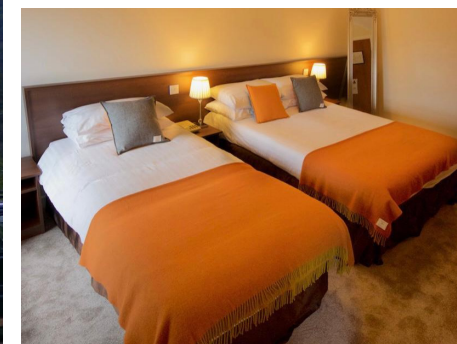
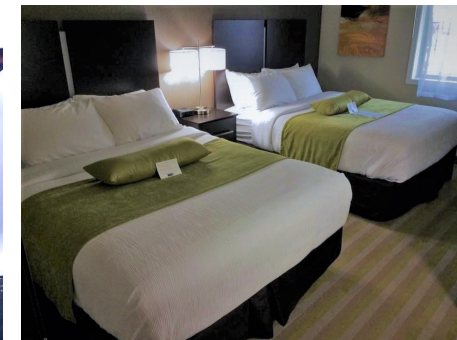
Marang Jungle Camp

Location: Marangduet, Ngangla

Capacity: 10 pax

Category: Eco-lodge

Mobile: +975 17459250



T-Wang Hotel

Location: Core town, Tingtibi, Zhemgang

Room Amenities:

attached bath
cable TV
choice of double and twin beds

Capacity: 15 pax

Mobile: +975 17316346 / 17632459 / 17761422

ACCOMMODATIONS



Pantang Eco-Lodge
Location: Pantang, Phangkhar
Capacity: 10 pax
Mobile:



Manas Eco Lodge

Location: Tungudenpa, Pangbang

Capacity: 10 pax



Manas Hotel

Location: Sonamthang, Panbang

Capacity: 15 pax

Mobile: +975 17932622

ACCOMMODATIONS



Ogyen Zilnon Inn

Location: Sonamthang, Panbang

Capacity: 15 pax

Category: Budget hotel



Tshewang Buthri VHS

Location: Buli

Phone: 17544554

Tshering Yuden VHS

Location: Buli

Phone: 77444780



Trong Village Homestay

Location: Dhangkhar

Phone: 17649262



White Bellied Heron Camp

Location: Berti, Trong, Zhemgang

Capacity: 10 pax

Category: Eco-lodge

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