

SAMPLE TOUR ITINERARY

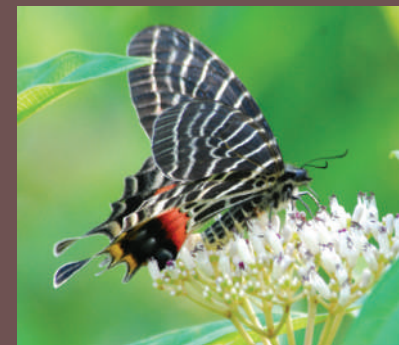


HISTORY AND CULTURE



ACCOMMODATIONS

TRASHI YANGTSE TOURISM ATTRACTIONS







TRASHI YANGTSE

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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Trashiyangtse town view



Photo Courtesy: en.wikipedia.org

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 districts. If more tourists travel to the rural areas to experience another aspect of Bhutan, or if the resources in the East 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 enough 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, distinguishable 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 discovering real Bhutan.

About the Dzongkhag

Trashi Yangtse or the “Land of Auspicious Fortune” borders the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh in the east and China to the north. Its altitude ranges from 500-5,400 meters. It is a land famed for its chili species called Urka-Bangla, traditional paper-making skills, the craft of wood-turning, a food recipe called Phrum Kempa, Ludlow’s Bhutan Swallowtail butterfly, and verdant rhododendron forests.

On the cultural and religious front, the district is renowned for Chorten Kora, Gomphu Kora, Rigsum Gonpa, Ombha Nye, Pemaling Nye, and others. Ethnically, the district has mixed inhabitants such as the Yangtseps who speak a language called Dzala Kha, Khengpas who speak Khengkha, and Kurtoeps who speak Chochangacha besides the original inhabitants who speak Tshangla.

In spring and autumn, the district comes to life with festivities where people dress in their finest clothes and watch mask and folk dances in ancient monasteries and temples. The lively Gomphu Kora Festival, an annual event observed in the month of March, draws pilgrims from as far as Tawang in the neighboring Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

The district’s fertile soil and favorable climatic condition allow the farmers to grow different kinds of cereals and fruits. Trashi Yangtse is the home of the Boomdeling Wildlife Sanctuary which harbors rare plants and animals including the majestic Royal Bengal Tiger, snow leopard, and red panda. The district also abounds with a kaleidoscope of rare plants, butterflies, and endangered birds including the rare black-necked cranes which roost in the dzongkhag’s swamps and wetlands during winters. The district’s radiant valleys of meadows and flowers are home to hundreds of butterfly species.

TRASHIYANGTSE AT A GLANCE

National Statistical Bureau		2021	<i>EDUCATION</i>	
Area (sq. km)	1,438.8		Tertiary Institute under RUB	0
Altitude Range (m)	500-5400		Central Schools	3
Gewogs	8		Higher Secondary Schools	0
Chiwogs	41		Middle Secondary Schools	1
Villages	117		<i>AGRICULTURE</i>	
Gungtong	694		Dry land (acres)	2,400
			Wet land (acres)	10,813.16
			Orchard (acres)	0.5
<i>POPULATION</i>			<i>INFRASTRUCTURE</i>	
Total	16,960		Roads (Kms)	678.1
Population density (per sq. km)	11.79		Electricity Coverage (%)	99.9
<i>HEALTH</i>			Telephone Connections (Nos)	169
Hospitals	1		Internet Connections (Nos)	96
Indigenous Units	2		Religious Institutions	9
Basic Health Units (BHUs)	8		Religious Monuments	504
Rural water supply coverage (%)	100		No. of tourists visited (2019)	0

DISTANCE BY ROAD

From	To	Distance	Duration
Paro	Thimphu	65 kms	1 hr 15 mins
Thimphu	Wangdue	70 kms	3 hrs
Wangdue	Trongsa	137 kms	5 hrs 30 mins
Trongsa	Bumthang	65 kms	2 hrs
Bumthang	Mongar	190 kms	8 hrs
Monggar	Trashiyangtse	120 kms	5 hrs 45 mins
T/Yangtse	Bumdeling	16 kms	45 mins
T/Yangtse	Gomphu Kora	33 kms	1 hr 30 mins
T/Yangtse	Trashigang	55 kms	2 hrs
Trashigang	S/Jongkhar	180 kms	7 hrs
S/Jongkhar	Gauwahati, Assam	110 kms	3 hrs

Map of human settlements



LEGEND

- Road
- River
- Dزونگ
- Gewog
- Human Settlement

YANGTSE COMMUNITY TOUR - EXPLORE THE TROVE OF TREASURES



College of Zorig Chusum,
Culture, People



March-May,
September-November



1800-2800m



Warm



Moderate



6 Nights 7 Days

Trashi Yangtse is a cultural landmark associated with the 9th century exiled Tibetan Prince Lhasey Tsangma, amongst others. The Dongtir Dzong dates back to the grandsons of Lhasey Tshangma and was later rebuilt by Tertön Pema Lingpa, and the Jamkhar village is probably the oldest historically documented village in Bhutan, where Prince Lhasey is said to have lived.

Chorten Kora was built in the 18th century and is the most prominent landmark in Yangtse. It is said that a pious Dakini princess from Arunachal Pradesh in India entombed herself live within the Stupa to meditate for all sentient beings. Gomphu kora temple is another cultural landmark built on the banks of Drangmechu where Guru Padma Sambhava is said to have meditated.

Tfrashi Yangtse is a library of myths, legends, and history, which reflects the region's past. People are known for the skills of master architects and the college of Zorigchusum in Yangtse serves as a storehouse of the 13 traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts in the country.

01
DAY

Activity



Arrival at Paro international
airport - explore Paro valley

Night halt



Paro

02
DAY

Activity



Paro - Yonphula - Trashi Yangtse:
enroute visit Yoenphula Lhakhang,
Sherubtse college, and Gomphu Kora.

Night halt



Yangtse

03
DAY

Activity



Yangtse sightseeing: visit college
of arts & crafts, Chorten Kora,
Dongtir Dzong & experience
wooden bowl making (Dapa)

Night halt



Yangtse

04
DAY

Activity



A day hike to Dho-Ngag Choeling
Goenpa via Namruchen & Bechen
- the village of the giant phallus,
experience community life.

Night halt



Yangtse

05
DAY

Activity



Explore Yangtse and experience
the community life

Night halt



Yangtse VHS

06
DAY

Activity



Yangtse to S/Jongkhar

Night halt



S/Jongkhar

07
DAY

Activity



Depart from Bhutan (S/Jongkhar
to Guwahati)



LUDLOW BHUTAN GLORY TOUR - AMIDST THE PARADISE OF BUTTERFLIES



College of Zorig Chusum,
Culture, People



March - May,
September - November



1800 - 2800m



Warm



Moderate



6 Nights 7 Days

Trashi Yangtse district is home to about 130 species of butterflies out of 800 species recorded in Bhutan. The exquisite Ludlow's Bhutan Swallowtail (*Bhutani Ludlow*) is a national butterfly, which is endemic to Bhutan and the adjoining Indian states. The other very rare species is the Bhutia Extended White (*Pieris extensa bhutya* Talbot).

Bhutan's North-Eastern Park, the 1,545 sq.km Boomdeling Wildlife Sanctuary, provides all conditions required for the butterflies to flourish. Additionally, it houses around 100 species of mammals, including globally endangered species such as Snow Leopard, Royal Bengal Tiger, and Red Panda. Visitors to this eastern paradise, from November to March, can relish the sights of the globally endangered Black-necked Cranes, roosting and dancing in the wide expanse of the Sanctuary. The Reserve offers a cultural treat too, with Rigsum Gonpa, located within the Sanctuary.

- 01 DAY**
 Activity Arrival at S/Jongkhar
 Night halt S/Jongkhar
- 02 DAY**
 Activity S/Jongkhar - Yangtse: enroute Palri Buddha Park in Wamrong
 Night halt Yangtse
- 03 DAY**
 Activity Yangtse sightseeing: visit the college of Zorigchusum - 13 arts & crafts, Chorten Kora & experience community life.
 Night halt Yangtse VHS


- 04 DAY**
 Activity Yangtse - Boomdeling: enroute visit traditional handmade paper units, explore Boomdeling valley, the black-necked crane habitat.
 Night halt Rigsum Gonpa
- 05 DAY**
 Activity Boomdeling - Pelri Gonpa: enroute visit Rigsum Gonpa & Pelri Gonpa (Ludlow butterfly hotspot), and Dechen Phodrang
 Night halt Pelri Gonpa
- 06 DAY**
 Activity Pelri Gonpa - Yangtse: enroute explore the Bumdir community, visit Dechen Phodrang, Solomang Community.
 Night halt Yangtse VHS
- 07 DAY**
 Activity Yangtse: Explore Tsekharla and experience the community life
 Night halt Paro
- 08 DAY**
 Activity Yangtse - Yonphula - Paro
 Night halt Paro
- 09 DAY**
 Activity Depart from Paro international airport

LEGEND

- District Border
- Gewog Border
- River
- Dzong
- Gewog
- Village
- District
- Indian Airport
- Airport
- Paved Road
- Farm Road
- Bridge
- Pass
- Town
- Park
- Temple
- Tour Route
- Other Route
- Trek Route
- Food
- Excursion
- Hiking
- Camp
- Communities
- Stupa







Trashiyangtse town view

HISTORY & CULTURE

Photo Courtesy: Fb, Heavenly Bhutan Travels

Cultural Map of Trashi Yangtse



Kheni model village



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Bonám Tobgáú Tobdheñ



Historical Sites & Heritage



Photo Courtesy: alamy.com

DONGTIR DZONG

Sitting majestically on a spur below which flows Dongtirchu on the right and Kholongchu on the left, Dongtir Dzong is one of the oldest of its kind in Bhutan. It was founded by Gongkar Gyal, son of Chebu Thongleksen and grandson of prince Lhasey Tsangma who migrated from Tibet to Bhutan in the 9th century. However, due to constant military raids from Tibet, the local people gradually abandoned the place resulting in the Dzong falling into ruins. Later, in the 15th century, Terton Pema Lingpa (12th Century Treasure Discoverer) rebuilt the fortress and named it Trashigang Yangtse or “the fortress of auspicious fortune”. In the 17th century, the Dzong was surrendered to the invading armies of Trongsa Penlop Chogyal Minjur Tempa.

The three-storied Dongtir Dzong houses many sacred relics including a statue of Avalokiteshvara, an imprint of Pema Lingpa’s palm, 100 volumes of the sacred scripts - Kanjur and Sungten - printed in golden letters, and Terphur (treasure dagger). A sacred boulder, known as Dam Lung, lies at the entrance to the fortress.



Photo Courtesy: bhutandzongs.com

TRASHI YANGTSE DZONG

Trashigang Yangtse was a sub-district (Dungkhag) under Trashigang Dzongkhag until 1991 and created as an independent district in 1992. With this newly acquired status, a new Dzong was built to serve as the headquarters for the district administration, while the old Dongtir Dzong, located four kilometers away from the Trashigang Yangtse town, was designated for the sole use of the clergy.

The new Dzong is built in traditional Bhutanese architecture and squats on a ridge just above the district’s main town at Chorten Kora. Besides the district administration, the Dzong houses the offices of the judiciary and hosts the region’s biggest annual festival, the Trashigang Yangtse Tshechu. Dzongs symbolize the pride, identity, and unity of the people in various regions across Bhutan.



Myths & Legends



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Jamjoo's Journal

RANGTHANGWOONG

The Tibetan prince, Lhasey Tsangma who lived in the 9th century, had two grandsons who were renowned for their physical strength. One day, the two ventured out separately and returned with a large rock slab each. The rocks fitted on each other perfectly like Rangthang - traditional grindstone. This is how the name of the village, Rangthangwoong, was derived. The rocks are still preserved near the Tsenkharla Central school today.



Photo Courtesy: swangdi618.blogspot.com

BAGA OF NANGKHAR AMA

As one travels towards Trashi Yangtse, a clear fissure on the cliff across the Drangmechhu (river) fascinates passers-by. The fissure resembles a woman's pudendum.

A folklore has it that a woman named Nangkhar Ama from the village of Nangkhar was endowed with breathtaking beauty. Although married, she had a clandestine affair with a wealthy man from the neighboring village of Dungro. The two met secretly at a nearby cave called Maentsanlung.

One day, the husband found out about the affair. The two men then agreed on a duel to resolve the issue once and for all. To avoid what would surely have been a disastrous confrontation, Nangkhar Ama is said to have removed her pudendum and hurled it across the Drangmechhu. It landed on the cliff, leaving behind an impression of the pudendum ever since.

Today, with the onset of monsoon, water trickles down the fissure; this, the local people say, is the time the women from the nearby village of Jamkhar become promiscuous and tend to engage in amorous affairs.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: waytobhutan.com

RUINS OF JAMKHAR

Situated on a slanting ridge about eight kilometers drive from the Trashi Yangtse-Trashigang highway, Jamkhar is probably the oldest historically documented village in Bhutan. The village became well-known after prince Lhasey Tsangma, who was banished from Tibet, decided to settle there in the 9th century.

It is said that Lhasey Tsangma traveled from western Bhutan and reached a village which had no name. The inhabitants of the village wanted to appoint him as their ruler but the prince would accept their plea only if they built a mansion which would serve as his palace. The people responded by saying “Jam”, which in the Tshangla dialect means “easy”, and the mansion was accordingly built using stone slabs known as “Khar”. The village thus came to be known as Jamkhar.

The mansion which lies in ruins today was used by Lhasey Tsangma as his winter residence. In summer, he lived in Tsenkharla in Khamdang Geowg- which is located higher up the ridge from Jamkhar.



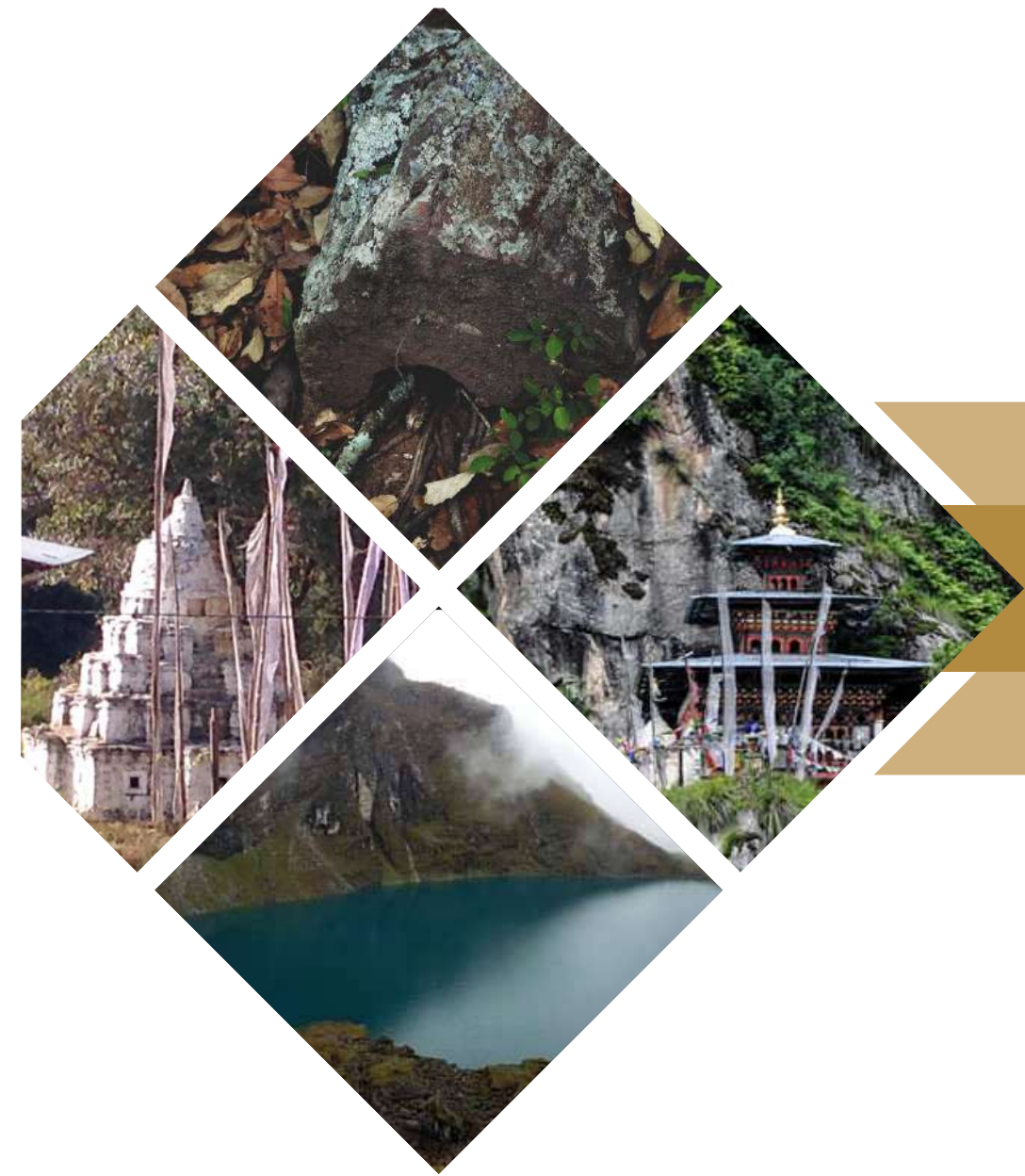
Photo Courtesy: Fb, Bhutan History

RUINS OF TSANGKHAR DZONG

Located in the village of Tsenkharla in Khamdang Gewog, the Dzong which lies in ruins today was built by Lhasey Tsangma, a grandson of Tibetan king Trisong Deutsen, in 836 AD. Lhasey Tsangma was banished by his brother, Lang Dharma, during whose reign numerous monasteries and other Buddhist establishments in Tibet were destroyed. He first settled in present-day Jamkhar but later moved to Tsenkharla and built the Tshangkhar Dzong as his summer residence.

Most of the aristocratic families in eastern and central Bhutan such as Khoche, Ponchen, Zhelgno, and Tsorgan trace their ancestry to Lhasey Tsangma’s sons ThrimiLhai Wangchuk and Chebu Thongleksen. The evolution of the region’s culture and history, by and large, is also attributed to these houses of nobility.

Wherever they settled, Lhasey Tsangma’s descendants built castle-like mansions called “Khar” in strategic locations and ruled the local communities.



Nye (Sacred sites)



Photo Courtesy: goldenbuddha.net

AVALOKITESHVARA STATUE

Among the hallowed artifacts housed in Dongtir Dzong is a statue of Chugchizhey (eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara) with a fascinating background.

Once an old woman who lived all by herself had gone to a forest to fetch firewood when she heard strange whispers from a clump of bush nearby. Upon taking a closer look, she was stunned to come across a replica of a stupa and statues of Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri (Bodhisattva of Wisdom). The woman was even more stupefied when the statue of Avalokiteshvara spoke thus: "no one brought us here, we came from Lhasa".

The woman took the statues and the stupa to her house and is supposed to have become very rich thereafter. Today, the statue of Avalokiteshvara is preserved in Dongtir Dzong while the statue of Jampelyang is housed in Minjey, Lhuentse, and the stupa in Tarphel, Trashi Yangtse.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Ge Nye

TSHONGPON NORBU ZANGPO'S SEYTHAB

On the way to Tawang in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, India, there is a rock which has an arched-hole drilled underneath and has a striking semblance to a traditional outdoor Bhutanese fire-place. According to a legend, the stone stove (Seythab) was used by the legendary merchant, Tshongpon Norbu Zangpo. Near the stove is a throne-like rock on which Tshongpon Norbu Zangpo is supposed to have sat during one of his many exploits.

Tshongpon Norbu Zangpo, who renounced his immense wealth and devoted himself to spiritual pursuits, is believed to be an emanation of Zambala (the god of wealth). There are numerous heroic tales about his travels accumulating wealth, and helping the poor and the needy. A temple, known as Lhakhang Dzong, at Lhodrak near Tibet's border with Bhutan has a shrine dedicated to Tshongpon Norbu Zangpo.



Photo Courtesy: uwice.gov.bt

SACRED TREE AT OMBHA

A majestic tree standing on the cliff-face at Ombha Nye is believed to have grown from the walking stick used by Guru Rinpoche. It is said that Guru Rinpoche, through a divine vision, instructed a reincarnate Buddhist master to nurture the sapling. Guru Padmasambhava stayed for two months meditating in a cave at Ombha which is considered to be one of the most sacred places in Bhutan.

Another such tree, a gigantic weeping cypress (*Cupressus comeyana*), stands on a rocky ledge surrounded by alpine trees like a sentinel guarding the surroundings at the entrance of the Dechenphodrang Lhakhang. It is believed to have been planted by Guru Padmasambhava at the spot where he subdued a local spirit and then meditated for a year.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Gi Nye

DECHENPHODRANG NYE

The sacred site of Dechen Phodrangis located at about 2,260 meters, about 10 kilometers' drive from Trashi Yangtsetown and roughly 30 minutes hike from the hamlet of Womanang.

The place has numerous sacred sites and artifacts associated with the 8th century Guru Padmasambhava, including his body imprint on a rock, Chakar (walking stick), Guru Latsho (soul lake), and Drupchu (holy spring). It also has a rock that symbolizes Zambalai Ku (God of wealth). A narrow waterhole bored into the rock near Dechen Phodrang monastery is believed to be as deep as the height of the cypress tree nearby.

It takes more than a day to visit the entire site of the Dechen Phodrang Nye which is located deep down in a gorge between two rivers, and hidden in an idyllic setting among huge boulders. The Nye is frequented by pilgrims from across the country.

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Photo Courtesy: Fb, Yee Gateway

OMBHA NYE

In the 8th century, Guru Padmasambhava is believed to have meditated for two months in a cave at Ombha Nye. During this stopover, the Guru subjugated an evil Naga (serpent) spirit and concealed numerous spiritual treasures in and around the sacred site. Ombha Nye was rediscovered by Terton Guru Choewang (1212-1273). The name of the place is derived from the sacred Chokoe (classical Tibetan script) sacred letter "OM" which is inscribed on a rock at the entrance to the sacred site. It is believed that Ombha Nye is the physical representation of

Guru Padmasambhava while the Aja Nye in Mongar represents his speech, Hungrel Dra in Paro represents his mind, Khenpajong his wisdom and Singye Dzong his activity. The secret objects concealed at Ombha consist of Guru's treasure box, Rinchen Terzoed (a sacred scripture) and his walking staff, among others. Visiting the Nye entails a two-hour uphill climb from the village of Kheni or Tsangphuchen.



Photo Courtesy: bayuel.com

GUNGJA NYE

Located on the bank of Gongri (river) in Toedtsho gewog, it is here that Khandro Yeshey Tshogyal is believed to have offered tea to Guru Rinpoche at noon. The Nye's original name was thus Gung Ja, meaning "midday tea". It is a two-hour journey on foot from the quaint little town of Duksum.

This sacred place comprises the meditation cave of the Guru; Guru's Ter Drom (treasure trove); a shoe (Tshoglam) belonging to the Guru; a statue of Guru Nangsi Zilnoen; and several paintings and stone artifacts. The deity of Gungja Nye is Goenye Chophel who was subdued by the Guru and became a protector of Buddhism.

Along the river bank, one can explore stone objects like Tashi Gomang (portable altar), grindstones, Guru's throne, and Drenagchung (a mask of a figure which represents the prosecutor in the dance of the judgment of the dead). Below the main shrine lies a stone Dungkar (conch) and male and female holy springs which flow into the main river. There are three boulders nearby which represent Rigsum Gonpo (the holy trinity of Chenrigzee, Chhana Dorjee and Jampelyang). The best time to visit the Nye is spring and winter.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Gi Nye

KHARCHEN DRAK

To visit Kharchen Drak, pilgrims must take a 30-minute drive from the Chorten Kora town to Tshaling village in Boomdeling Gewog and then continue on foot for an hour. The site is instantly recognizable due to its unique ambiance amidst mountains and gorges within which can be found numerous sacred objects and sites. It is said that Kharchen Drak also contains the concealed cremation ground called Silwatsel and a self-originated Buddhist ritual drum and white conch.

The site also boasts of numerous spiritual treasures including the Guru's meditation cave, a shrine and foot imprints of Zambala (God of wealth), the cave of Dorji Phagmo (Vajravarahi), Guru's footprint, a tiger-faced mermaid, a longevity vase, and Rho Ngedrupchen (the auspicious corpse of profound fortune). Pilgrims also claim that there are scattered physical remains of an vanquished demon called Matamuruta. Behind Kharchen Drak lies a shrine which is believed to be the place where deity Hum Kala and his wife resided. Inside the cave is a secret passage where pilgrims attempt to wriggle through to receive blessings.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Gi Nye

NEYCHEN PEMALING

Neychen Pemaling refers to the most sacred site blessed by Guru Padmasambhava in Trashi Yangtse, it is also one of the most difficult places to reach, far more challenging than the trek to Singye Dzong. It is a three-day hike from the road point at Tobrang village. The holy sites are located mostly above an altitude of 4,500 meters and medicinal herbs are grown in abundance in the area.

The Nye is believed to be spread over four realms: Shar Dorjiling (east), Lho Ugyenling (south), Nub Pemaling (west), and Jang Karmaling (North). Each realm is said to comprise of one "great lake" and 108 smaller lakes, 108 cremation grounds, and numerous religious sites. The cave where Tibet's famous poet and yogi Milarepa meditated is one of the most popular sites at the Nye. The sacred lake Pel Dechog Khorlo Latsho is one of the primary sources of the Kholongchu river. Overall, the landscape around Pemaling is breath takingly beautiful.

Monks from Singye Dzong undertake a pilgrimage to Pemaling around August/September and meditate there for a few months every year.

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Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Ge Nye

NYE PELRITSE

Located near Rigsum Goenpa, Nye Pelritse can be reached via Rabselphu in upper Trashi Yangtse. Visitors are often overwhelmed with the unparalleled beauty, fascinating landmarks, and the mysticism that exudes from the place.

The sacred sites at Pelritse include the sacred lakes of Phurpa (Kila), Phagmo (Chakrasamvara), Tsepame (Amitayus Buddha), White Tara, and Blue Tara, and Goenpo Maning Nakpo (Mahakala). These lakes and sacred sites extend across an entire valley surrounded by dense forests and rocky ledges.

It is said that Pelritse also harbors a replica of Zangdopelri (the paradise of Guru Rinpoche), the abode of the twenty-one Dolma (Tara), and the shrines of Namthosey (the God of Wealth), Tsheringma (Five Sisters of Longevity), and the deity of Rigsum Gonpa (monastery), Goenyen Phaenbu. The site is also popular because of the overhanging twin cliffs of Nima and Dawa.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Jamjoo's Journal

CHORTEN KORA DUETHROE

The Chorten Kora Duethroe is built by Lama Jangchub Pelzang, it is considered one of the oldest and most sacred crematoriums in the region. It is said that the Lama Jangchub went to India and Tibet, and brought back soil samples and rocks of well-known Buddhist cemeteries like Durthroe Silwatsho in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, and deposited them on the cremation ground where the present Chorten Kora Duethroe stands.

As the original cremation ground was located at the top of a village settlement, it is said the Lama removed the crematory chapel, along with all timbers used to build the crematorium, and threw them into the Kholongchhu river, prophesying that he would relocate it downstream wherever the dismantled chapel remains piled up. It is said the scattered remains of the chapel and timbers had collected at the site where the current Duethroe is located.



Photo Courtesy: trashiyangtse.gov.bt

CHORTEN KORA FESTIVAL

Trashiyangtse's most prominent landmark, Chorten Kora (stupa of circumambulation) was built in the 18th century by Lama Ngawang Lodro. Modeled after the famous Boudhanath stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal, the colossal stupa took 12 years to build and was consecrated by the 13th Chief Abbot of Bhutan, Je Yonten Thaye.

A popular belief is that when the stupa - previously known as Duerong Chorten - was constructed, a pious Dakini princess from Arunachal Pradesh in India entombed herself in the stupa to meditate on behalf of all sentient beings.

Every year, Chorten Kora is the venue for two popular festivals - the Dakpa Kora held on the 15th of the first lunar month, originally dedicated to a Dakini Princess and the people of her community, and the Drukpa Kora held at the end of the first lunar month, popularly known as Namgang Kora for the locals. Today, both the festivals are attended by the Dakpa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutanese from all over eastern Bhutan.



Festivals



Photo Courtesy: tourismbhutan.com

MELHA FESTIVAL OF CHHEMA

Chhema is a village in Yalang Gewog and the people organize Melha Festival every year to ward off evil spirits and usher good health and prosperity in their village. By tradition, it is a naked dance, but the dancers today wear white cloth masks and skimpy undergarment.

The dance is performed at night in the village temple and the dancers chant religious phrases, beat drums aloud, and clang cymbals. The performance also involves a routine where the dancers forcefully grab spectators and hoist them up in the air.

As the clock ticks midnight, the venue is shifted to the outside of the temple where a bonfire is lit and the dance continues amid boisterous merry-making and laughter among spectators. With the evil spirits ferociously driven away, the festival comes to an end along with the dying embers of the bonfire.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, My Book & ocular

KENGA CHAM

Kengpa cham which literally translates to 'shy or shame dance' is performed in the village of Dukti in Trashigang on the 9th day of the 5th month of the lunar calendar. It is a rite of appeasement to the village's guardian deity, Manakpo, and helps ward off evil and is believed to bring peace and prosperity to the community.

All the men in the community of Dukti, Gashangmo, Luza, and Raynang participate in the dance while women join in small groups by welcoming the dancers into designated houses. They are ushered by house owners with Khadar (ceremonial scarf) and offered Nyender (cash) for blessing. The protagonist of the festivity, named Apa, is supposed to be dumb and only utters "au! au!" as he walks from house to house blessing people.

In some parts of eastern Bhutan, Kengpa Cham is performed by men wearing skeleton masks with bare minimal costumes, and wielding a phallus in their right hand. This dance is derived from Tertön Karma Lingpa's treasure book titled Gongpa Rangdrol Theadrel Chenpo.



Photo Courtesy: onestep4ward.com

TRASHIYANGTSE TSHECHU

The annual three-day Trashi Yangtse Tshechu was instituted recently by the clergy of the Dongtir Dzong and performed during the first month of the lunar calendar is one of the most colourful festivals in the district. Spectators come from all over the district dressed in their finest attire to witness the festivity which comprises mainly of mask and folk dances. Some of the popular mask dances performed include the Dance of the Lords of the Cremation Ground, the Dance of the Drummers of Drametse, the Dance of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, and the Dance of the Judgment of the Dead.

On the final day, a gigantic appliqué scroll (Thongdroel) depicting a pantheon of Buddhist deities is hung over the front facade of Trashi Yangtse Dzong. Devotees circumambulate and prostrate before the Thongdroel and, as the festivity draws to a close, spectators return home with the belief that they have obtained the blessing to live fruitfully and happily.



Photo Courtesy: norbulingkabhutan.com

HOONGLA FIRE FESTIVAL

Of the numerous ancient festivals which are celebrated in Trashi Yangtse, the Hoongla fire ritual is one of the most intriguing. An annual affair, the ritual is performed at Tokaphu Lhakhang in Tongzhang village.

The ritual is an ancient practice which traces its roots back to the Bon tradition and is observed around mid-August. Local folklore has it that the ritual helps dispel malignant spirits from their communities and is performed by both laymen and monks.

The ritual begins at dusk with the arrival of two rival groups representing the four hamlets of the Gewog at the Tokaphu Lhakhang. The groups are armed with flaring bamboo/fat-wood torches and Hoongla powder, made from dried juniper barks, as their chief arsenal. A skirmish then ensues whereby the rival groups spray the Hoongla powder on their opponents culminating into a battle-like scene amid a frenzy of fireballs, loud shrieks, and chants. The warriors then circumambulate the temple three times and continue the ritual till the crack of dawn the next day.



Photo Courtesy: nowherebhutan.com

GOMPHU KORA FESTIVAL

Gomphu Kora, located on the banks of Drangmechhu, is one of the most revered pilgrimage sites in Trashi Yangtse and all of eastern Bhutan. The place derives its name from Gomphu meaning 'meditation cave' and Kora which literally means 'circumambulation' and traces its origin to the times of Guru Rinpoche (8th century). Gomphu Kora Tshechu, therefore, means the 'festival of circumambulation.'

It is said Guru Padmasambhava meditated at the site to subdue the serpent demon that escaped from Tibet and caught at the site. A life-sized body impression of the Guru embedded on a rock can be seen still today. The numerous boulders strewn at the banks of the river, adjacent to the Gomphu Kora temple square, is believed to replicate the flayed skin of a malignant serpent demon. Among other spiritual wonders, the temple is believed to house a self-emanated relic of Padmasambhava and a stone resembling an egg of the mythical bird Garuda.

The three-day festival of circumambulation is a unique event that takes place every year in the month of March, corresponding to the tenth day of the second lunar month, and attracts thousands of pilgrims, some from as far as Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, India.



Monasteries & Stupas



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Tashi Yangtse Bumdelling Rigsum Gonpa Goenzin Dratshang

RIGSUM GOENPA

Rigsum monastery is picturesquely perched on an idyllic hillock at an altitude of about 2,500-3,000 meters, about an hourwalk from the nearest road at Zhapang community. The monastery is revered for its artifacts, the “self-speaking” statue of Jowo Shakyamuni, and exquisite murals depicting the life of the Buddha.

The monastery was built in the 18th century by Lama Tshering Gyamtsho, a close disciple of the 9th Je Khenpo Shakya Rinchen (1744-1755), and enlarged by his nephew Lama Jangchhub Gyeltshen.

Lama Tshering Gyamtsho meditated for three months in a cave which had body imprints of Rigsum Gonpo - the sacred trinity of Manjushri, Vajrapani and Avalokiteshvara - thus deriving the name of the monastery. He then invoked the blessing of the local deity, GenyenPhanbu, to build a small hermitage which eventually evolved into the present monastery

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: bayuel.com

SHAKSHING LHAKHANG

Ani Choeten Zangmo, the granddaughter of Terton Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), had three residential places viz. Toed Lhari in Tibet, Bar Kisa Gomai in Bumthang, and Wog Shakshing in eastern Bhutan, which is a village under Khamdang Gewog in Trashi Yangtse.

She founded Shakshing Lhakhang in the 16th century, became its abbot, and blessed the place with many treasures such as a sacred stove, saddle, hat, imprints of the Guru's foot and hand, and holy scriptures. After she passed away, the temple fell into ruins and was rebuilt by Lama Ugyen Rangdrol from Kurtoe Nyalamdung. Over the years, the monastery has undergone several renovations.

Today, the temple houses the statues of the Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, Chenrezig, Tara, Tsepamaed, and a set of vases belonging to Terton Ratna Lingpa (1403-1478). Kanjur Lhakhang, a new temple constructed above Shakshing, contains volumes of old Buddhist scriptures which were brought from Lhasa Darthang in Tibet.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Namgay Wangchuk

THRUECHU GOENPA

A revered place in Tongzhang, Thruachu Gonpa stands on a hill that resembles the seated posture of Arya Tara (Jetsun Dolma), about two hours' drive from the highway towards Gomphu Kora. Thruachu Gonpa is also the birthplace of the 7th Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche.

The monastery derives its name from a Thruachu (sacred spring) which is said to trickle out from the Baga (genitalia) of Jetsun Dolma. The Gonpa was initially founded by Togden Shakya Shri (1853-1919), a great yogi from Kham in Tibet, and later transformed into a Gomdhey (community hermitage) by GeshePekar. In 2000, NamkhaNyingpo Rinpoche converted it into a Shedra (monastic institute).



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Inside Bhutan

DARCHEN GOENPA

The monastery lies on the top of a hill surrounded by thick forests in Khamdang gewog and is about 30 to 45 minute walk from the road point. Ani Choeten Zangmo, the granddaughter of Terton Pema Lingpa, founded the monastery as her summer residence in the 16th century.

There are numerous sacred objects scattered around the temple - rock imprints of Ani Choeten Zangmo's foot and Dakini's pudendum, feast offering bowl, white conch, Zambala, Zhithro Lhatsho, Guru's Zhugthri (throne), and Guru Druphu (meditation cave) where an image of a "self-arisen" dragon is also visible. Similarly, a nearby cave bears many imprints of spiritual treasures of various religious figures. A few kilometers away from the temple are two lakes, Yabtsho Karpo and Yumtsho Marmo, shrouded in the thick broadleaved forest.

The people of Tongzhang come to pay homage to the statue of Zambala in order to receive blessings to prosper in livestock farming.



Other Attractions



Photo Courtesy: tourism.gov.bt

COLLEGE OF ZORIG CHUSUM

Thashi Yangtse district's reputation as the producer of one of Bhutan's finest artisans and craftsmen was reinforced with the establishment of the Thashi Yangtse Institute of Zorig Chusum in 1997. Located near Chorten Kora, just about two kilometres from the core town and above the general hospital, the institute was upgraded to a full-fledged college further reinforcing the importance of Bhutan's 13 arts and crafts to the nation's economy and identity.

The college provides courses and training in 10 different trades and vocations: painting (Lhadri), wood carving (Patra), sculpturing (Jinzo), ornament making (Trezo), good turning (Shagzo), traditional mask making (Bapzo), traditional boot making (Dralham), tailoring (Tshemzo), embroidery (Tshemdru) and machine embroidery.

The courses imparted are intensive with emphasis on quality and self-sustenance. The institute has produced some of the most reputed artisans in the country.



BOMDELING WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Bomdeling Wildlife Sanctuary is the conservation showpiece of Trashyangtse district. The sanctuary also encompasses parts of Lhuentse and Mongar and borders Tibet in the north and India in the northeast. It was established in 1995 to protect and preserve virgin Eastern Himalayan ecosystems ranging from warm broadleaved forests to alpine and sub-alpine habitats.

There are about 100 species of mammals that find sanctuary in this reserve including rare and globally endangered species such as Himalayan black bear, musk deer, blue sheep, snow leopard, Royal Bengal Tiger and red panda. From mid-November to early March, it becomes a paradise for bird lovers as this nature reserve provides shelter to about 150 rare black-necked cranes that roost in its marshy valleys every winter.

There is an impeccable variety of butterflies in Bomdeling Wildlife Sanctuary as well with about 130 species already recorded. The sanctuary also harbors several significant religious places such as Rigsum Goenpa, Singye Dzong and Dechenphodrang Lhakhang located inside this nature reserve.

The altitudes vary throughout the sanctuary ranging from 1,500 meters in the south to over 6,400 meters in the north. Most of the lower territories of the Sanctuary is blanketed with broadleaved forests with as many ridges, valleys and picturesque river gorges. The central region has ridges and valleys covered with scrub-land, conifer forest and broadleaved forest while the northern part is full of glacial lakes, valleys, scrub-land, alpine pastures, glaciers, snow peaks and scree slopes.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Inside Bhutan

Accommodations

ACCOMMODATIONS



Choki Farm House

Location: Chorten Kora, Trashi Yangtse
Facilities: Outdoor bathrooms and toilets
Contact: +975-2-333540, 17603602



Hotel Karmaling

Location: Chorten Kora
Facilities: Indoor bathrooms, hot water, western-style toilets
Contact: +975 17116766



Chorten Kora Lodge

Location: Chorten Kora

Facilities: Outdoor bathrooms and toilets

Contact: +975 17695884/17693392

VILLAGE HOME-STAYS (VHS)



Karma Choden
Location: Lamdra
Phone: 17781323



Tharpala
Location: Tarkashing
Phone: 17302303



Thukten Tshering
Location: Boomdeling
Phone: 17968117



Chorten Dendup
Location: Rinchengang
Phone: 17701156



Dechen Dorji
Location: Bimkhar
Phone: 17302098



Jamyang
Location: Omba
Phone: 17714103



Jigme Tenzin
Location: Ramjar
Phone: 17714103

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