

SAMPLE TOUR ITINERARY



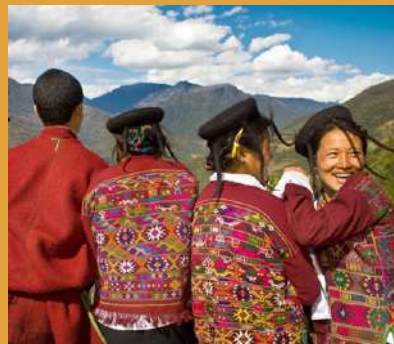
HISTORY AND CULTURE



ACCOMMODATIONS

TRASHIGANG

TOURISM ATTRACTIONS







TRASHIGANG

TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

- Sample Tour Itinerary
- History & Culture
- Accommodations

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SHINE (Sustainable Hospitality Industries Inclusive of Native Entrepreneurs)

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Publisher

SHINE (shine.grat.at)

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Funded by the European Union



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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Kanglung view in Trashigang



Photo Courtesy: mapio.net

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

Often dubbed as “the Jewel of the east”, Trashigang, bordering the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, is the most populous district of Bhutan. Located within an altitude range of 600 to over 4,000 meters, the district is home to the Brokpa community, an ethnically distinct semi-nomadic community, and the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary which, according to the local people, harbors the Yeti, the mythical snowman.

Bhutan’s largest river, Drangme Chhu, flows through the district. Trashigang serves as a key junction of the east-west highway connecting all the way to the Indian plains in Assam. The district’s administrative headquarters is located within the 17th century fortress of Trashigang Dzong, strategically built atop a mound that overlooks the Drangme Chhu.

Trashigang is well-known for its multi-cultural backdrop, being inhabited by five groups of ethnically diverse people, each with its own dialect: Tshangla, Dakpa, Brokpa, Khenpa and Kurtoep. This diversity adds color and variety to the district’s rich cultural mosaic.

Radhi village is famous for Buray weaving, raw silk textiles woven using locally cultivated silkworm. Further east, the Brokpa community makes attire from yak and sheep skin. The Dakpas of Thongrong are skilled makers of bamboo products like their counterparts in Kangpara in south Trashigang, who are also adept in bamboo weaves. Meanwhile, the village of Barshong was once famous for iron ore mines with a locally-crafted sword called Barshongpa, greatly in demand all over Bhutan.

In terms of monuments, the district has the famous ruins of Yue-Pemachen and Jeri Dzong, while monasteries like Bremung Lhakhang, Chador Lhakhang, Kupijigtsam and Yongphu Lhakhang preserve ancient narratives on Buddhism and local history. Myths and legends of Ama Jomo and Meme Dhangling abound as well.

Bhutan’s first degree college, Sherubtse College, was founded in 1966 at Kanglung and the only school for the blind in Khaling in the early 1970s. The lowest human settlement in the district is found at an altitude of 550 meters at Deno of Lumang gewog and the highest in Merak at an altitude of 4,600 meters.

TRASHIGANG AT A GLANCE

National Statistical Bureau		2020		
Area (sq. km)	3,066.99	<i>EDUCATION</i>		
Altitude Range (m)	600-4500	Tertiary institutes under RUB	2	
Dungkhags	3	Central schools	3	
Gewogs	15	Higher secondary schools	4	
Chiwogs	78	Middle secondary schools	7	
Villages	410	<i>AGRICULTURE</i>		
Gungtong	1,055	Dry land (acres)	39,819.03	
<i>POPULATION</i>		Wet land (acres)	5669.1	
Total	45,518	Orchard (acres)	1,692.8	
Population density (per sq. km)	33	<i>INFRASTRUCTURE</i>		
<i>HEALTH</i>		Length of Road (kms)	992.49	
Hospitals	7	Electricity Coverage (%)	99.97	
Indigenous Units	7	Telephone Connections (Nos).	501	
Basic Health Units (BHUs)	36	Religious Institutions	8	
Rural water supply coverage (%)		99	Religious Monuments	8
		No. of tourists visited (2019)	2,648	

DISTANCE BY ROAD

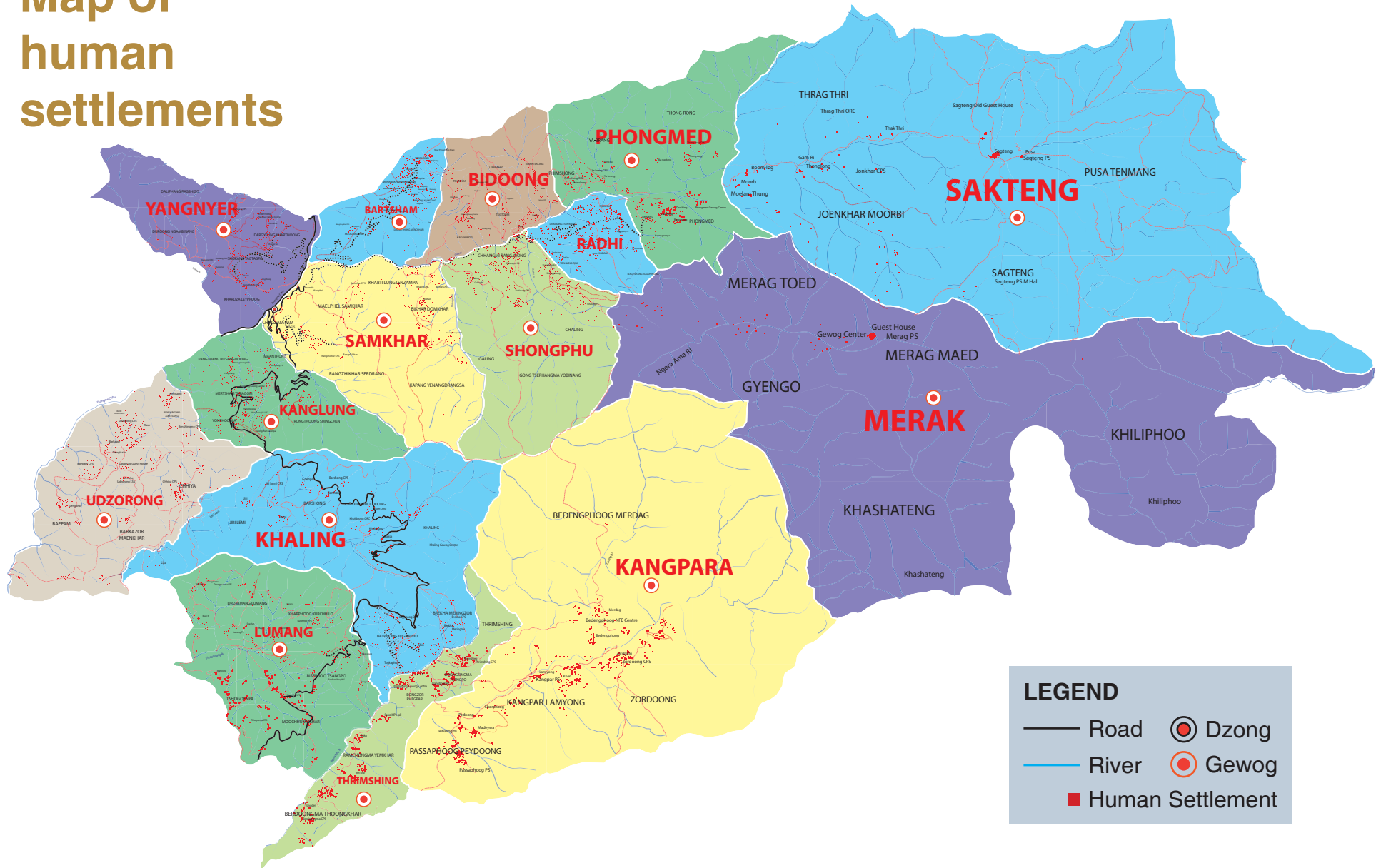
From	To	Distance	Duration
Paro	Thimphu	54 kms	1.5 hrs
Thimphu	Wangdi	70 kms	3 hrs
Wangdi	Trongsa	129 kms	5 hrs
Trongsa	Bumthang	68 kms	2.5 hrs
Bumthang	Mongar	198 kms	7 hrs
Mongar	Trashigang	91 kms	3.5 hrs
Trashigang	Rangjung	16 kms	45 mins
Trashigang	Radhi	21 kms	1 hrs
Trashigang	Merak	64 kms	3 hrs
Trashigang	Sakteng	70 kms	4 hrs
Trashigang	Kanglung	22 kms	45 mins
Trashigang	Yonphula	33 kms	1 hr
Trashigang	Khaling	54 kms	2 hrs
Trashigang	Wamrong	81 kms	3 hrs
Trashigang	S/Jongkhar	180 kms	7 hrs
S/Jongkhar	Guwahati	100 kms	3 hrs

DOMESTIC FLIGHT

There is a domestic flight from Paro to Yonphula five times a week with a flight duration of 45 minutes.

Time	Flight	Day	Dest.
8:00 - 8:45 am	Druk Air 30	S M T--S	PBH – YON
8:00 - 8:45 am	Druk Air 80	----T--	PBH – YON

Map of human settlements



RADHI-CHALING CULTURE TOUR - DECODING THE CULTURAL HEARTLAND OF THE EAST



Culture, Historical sites & Handicrafts



March - May,
September - November



1080m - 3220m



Warm



Moderate



5 Nights 6 Days

The cultural wealth of Trashigang, one of Bhutan's largest and historic districts, has not yet been fully explored. Starting from the iconic 17th century Trashigang Dzong that houses sacred relics discovered by the 12th Century Treasure Discoverer, Terton Pema Lingpa. A trip to the beautiful valley of Radhi, dubbed "eastern Bhutan's Rice Bowl," enables one to visit several of these historic monasteries, which are mirrors of the past.

The remnants of Yue Pemachen, date back 1,400 years, the iron chain bridge reportedly built by Thangthong Gyalpo in the 14th century and a finger-sized statue of Chador or Chana Dorji (Vajrapani) discovered by Terton Pema Lingpa from Yutsho Lake at Khar in Pemagatshel are few examples of the region's colossal cultural sites. A stupa with the heart of the Abominable Yeti believed to be its main relic adds to the mysticism of the region.

Additionally, one can see people's day-to-day lives and livelihoods, which are different from those in western Bhutan: the raw silk weavers of Radhi, dairy farming, the diet of the people, and others. Visitors can also see people engaged in Bhutan's national game, archery. And tourists can align their visit with the three-day Trashigang Tsechu, a cultural bonanza of the east.

01
DAY

Activity



Arrive at Paro International Airport –sightseeing in Paro

Night halt



Paro

02
DAY

Activity



Paro-Yoephula-Trashigang (Domestic flight), en-route visit Yoephula Lhakhang and Sherubtse College.

Night halt



Trashigang

03
DAY

Activity



Tashigang to Rangjung – Morning, visit Rangjung monastery, and afternoon, explore Radhi valley and visit the raw silk weaving centre.

Night halt



Radhi VHS

04
DAY

Activity



Radhi to Chaling - visit YoePemachen ruins and see Acholampo cham and explore Chaling and Shongphu valley.

Night halt



Rangjung

05
DAY

Activity



Rangjung to Samdrupjongkhar – en-route visit Wamrong Monastery and Palri Buddha Park.

Night halt



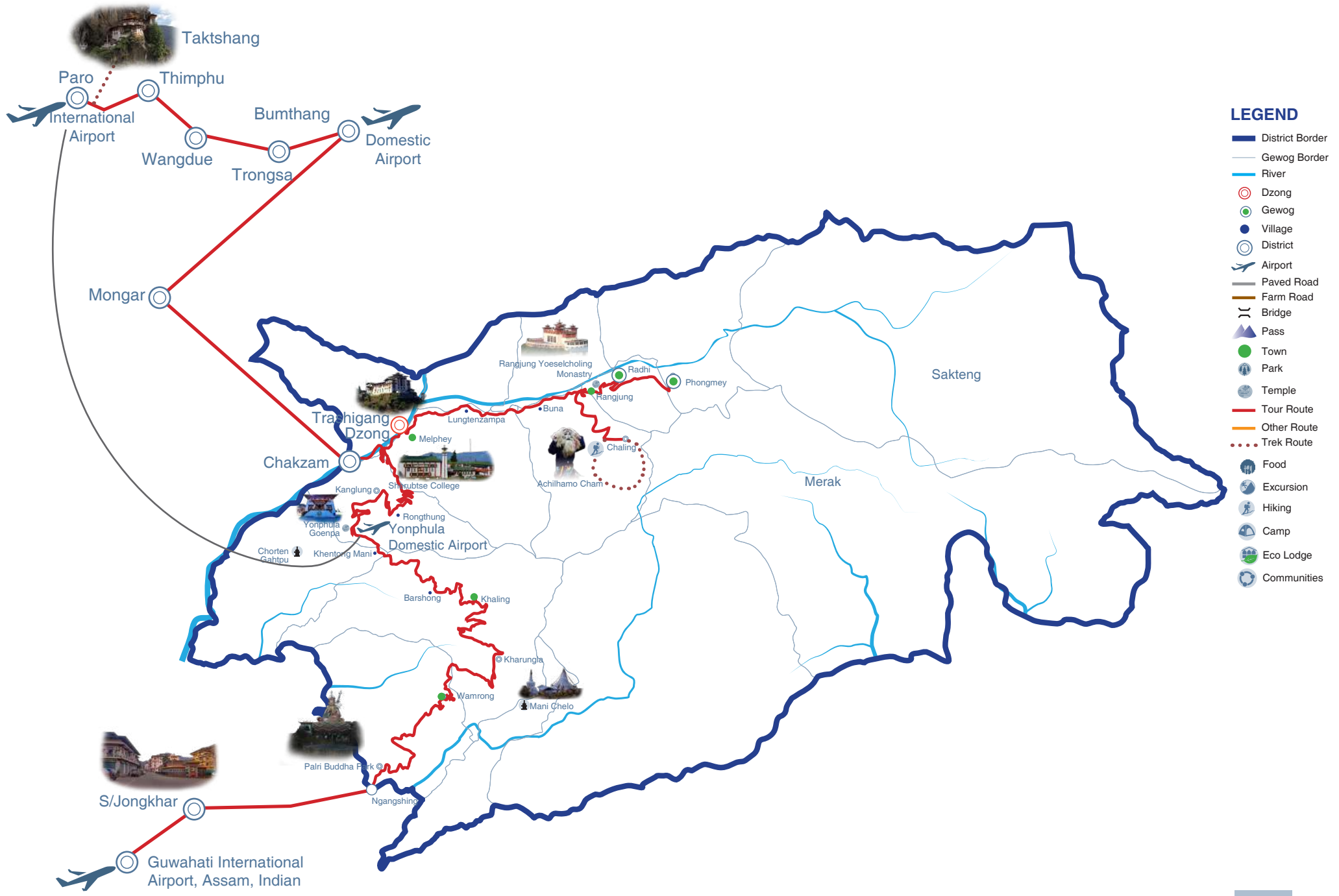
S/jongkhar

06
DAY

Activity



Depart from Bhutan via Guwahati International airport, Assam, India



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

MERAK SAKTENG RHODODENDRON TOUR - A JOURNEY INTO THE PAST



Culture, Historical sites,
Handicrafts & Rhododendrons



March - May,
September - November



3400m - 3500m



Warm and
cold



Moderate



7 Nights 8 Days

A region that was opened to tourism only in 2012, and house a community that simply refuses to embrace and emulate the modern ways of living. The people lead a semi-nomadic life, with cattle rearing, especially yaks, at the center of their lives.

Almost every part of the valleys has a story, immortalized in the sacred monasteries; captivating folk songs, bewitching dances and festivals, and a way of life that has remained unscathed.

A world of its own, the valleys are home to 35 species of Rhododendrons, from the 46 found in the country. They mostly grow in the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, which is, thus, called “Paradise of Rhododendrons”. Bhutan’s national flower, blue poppy (*Meconopsis galydiana*) is a another delight to discover in the valley.

01
DAY

Activity



Arrive at Paro international airport-sightseeing in Paro

Night halt



Paro

02
DAY

Activity



Paro -Yoephula-Trashigang (Domestic flight), enroot visit Yonphula Lhakhang and Sherubtse college.

Night halt



Trashigang

03
DAY

Activity



Trashigang-Merak-en-route visit Ranjung monastery, explore Radhi and Merak valley.

Night halt



Merak VHS

04
DAY

Activity



Merak to Nagchungla Base (Hike) – one the way you can see various species of rhododendron flowers.

Night halt



Nagchungla

05
DAY

Activity



Nagchungla base to Sakteng (Hike) – one the way you can see various species of rhododendron flowers.

Night halt



Sakteng VHS

06
DAY

Activity



Sakteng-Trashigang - morning explore Sakteng valley and drive to Trashigang.

Night halt



Trashigang

07
DAY

Activity



Trashigang-Samdrupjongkhar Enroot visit Trashigang Dzong, and Palri Buddha park in Wamrong.

Night halt



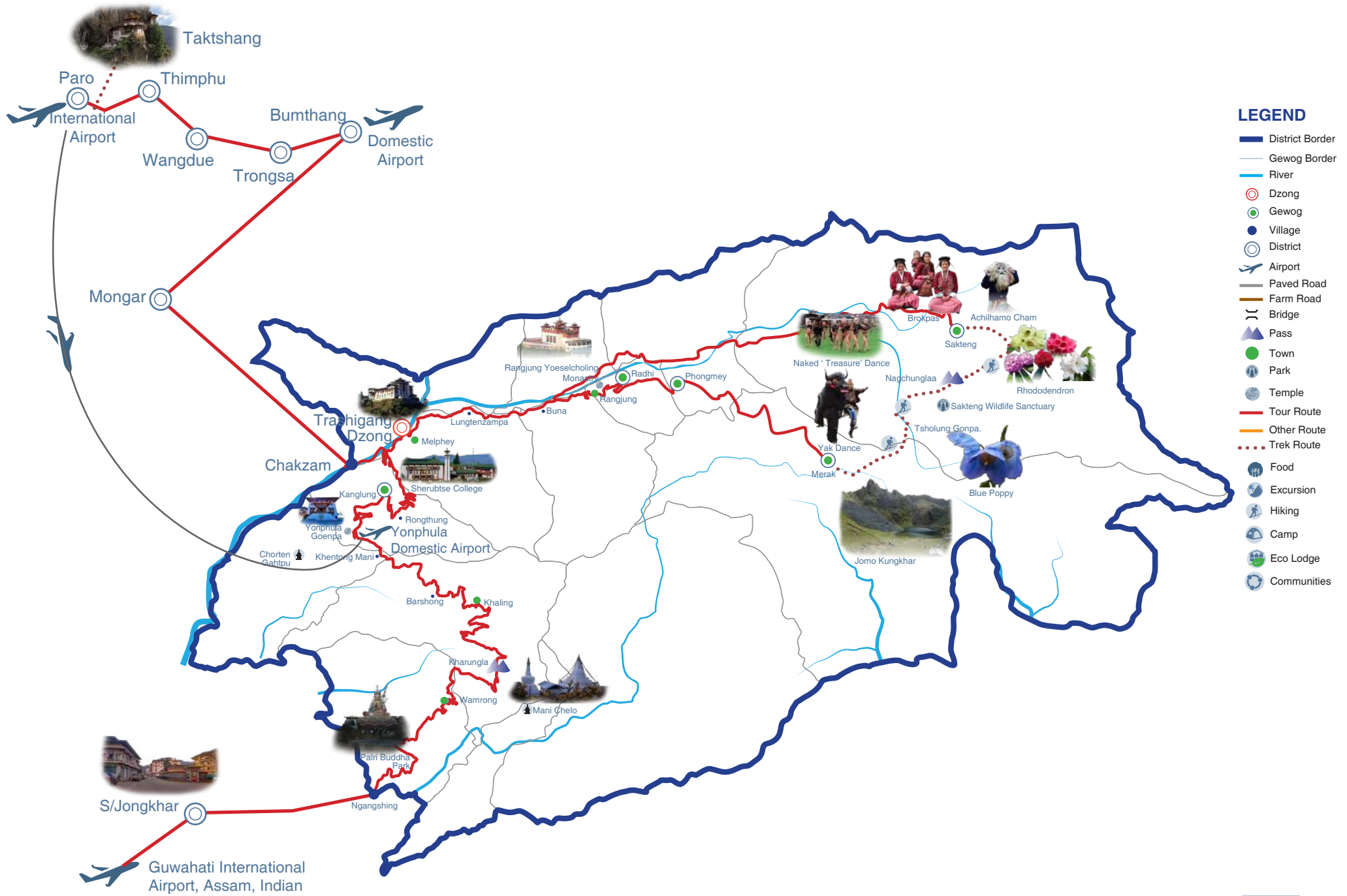
Sakteng VHS

08
DAY

Activity



Depart from Bhutan via Guwahati international airport, Assam, India





The nomads of Merak are a quintessential highland community inhabiting the north-east frontiers of Trashigang.



Photo Courtesy: alodrukpatours.com

HISTORY & CULTURE

HISTORY & CULTURE

Cultural Map of Trashigang



The snow-capped mountain peaks to the distant north of Trashigang is believed to be the domicile of the elusive Yeti.





Historical Sites & Heritage

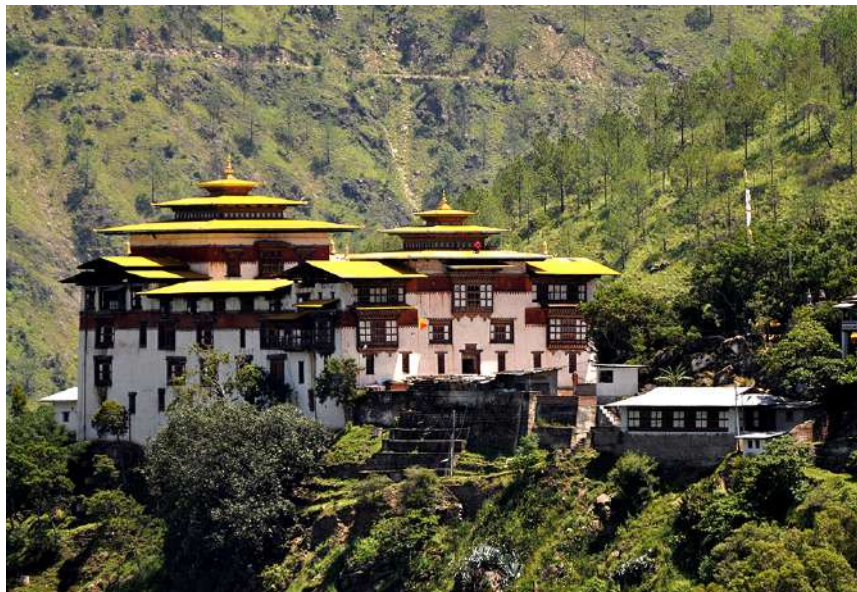


Photo Courtesy: bhutandzongs.com

TRASHIGANG DZONG

The historic stronghold of Trashigang Dzong is this far-flung district's religious and administrative heart. Its ancient cobblestone yards explode each year in a riot of color, pomp and ceremony that is eastern Bhutan's biggest three-day annual religious mask dance festival (Tsechu).

"Trashigang Dzong" means "Fortress on the Auspicious Hill." Set atop a high spur above the milk-white coils of the Drangme Chhu River, Chogyal Minjur Tempa, the Third Druk Desi in 1667, built the dzong and its walled ramparts as a defense against marauders from the north.

Seen from the steep and narrow ravine cut by the river over eons of geological time, the fortress on the hill gives an impression of towering impregnability. Perhaps the reason, according to legend, rival Tibetan forces seeing the dzong and beating a hasty retreat, observed that it appeared not to be on solid ground but an un-breachable "Sky Dzong." Thus, for over 300 years, it remained a political stronghold of eastern Bhutan.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Ge Nye

BOKHA DZONG

Bokha Dzong in Kholdung village, Khaling, preserves the legacy of eastern Bhutan's guardian deities, Ama Jomo and Memey Dhangling. It is one of the oldest temples in the region. Near the temple, visitors can still see the archaeological ruins of the old Jeri Dzong.

Bokha Dzong is a veritable store of ancient relics. A piece of fabric, which belonged to the mountain deity, Meymey Dhangling, is one such relic, sealed inside a box and opened for public display once a year. Also available for viewing at the temple are Memey Dhangling's shield, arrow, headgear, and spears. Other artifacts include a mask of Ama Jomo, a huge copper urn belonging to Memey Dhangling which, when filled with bangchang or fermented corn beer on a designated day annually, reportedly boils on its own, with no fire involved. Statues of Buddha Shakyamuni and Avalokiteshvara are other sacred artifacts.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Kuenga Tashi

YUE PEMACHEN

Bhutanese elders retell the story of the fabled kingdom of Yue Pemachen as a part of the epic tale or namthar of Khandro Drowa Zangmo. However, few people know that its ruins, at least what's claimed as its remains, exist today in Chaling, Trashigang district.

According to local legends, Pemachen's king, Sey Kuentu Lekpa, built the small stupa in the center of the ruins. The prince, and later king, features prominently as a central character in the epic namthar, the son of good king Kalawangpo, and the celestial lady Khandro Drowa Zangmo, the titular figure. Locals say the history of Yue Pemachen and Kuentu Lekpa dates back 1,400 years, but no conclusive evidence exists yet for this claim.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Dorji Dorji

CHORTEN NAKPO

Marked by its uncommon black paint, this stupa has a fascinating history connected to the popular Bhutanese epic or namthar of Khandro Drowa Zangmo. In the story, the righteous king Kala Wangpo falls under the spell of the evil witch Duem Hachang. Kala Wangpo's former queen, the virtuous Khandro, or 'celestial lady,' after whom the epic is named, dies, leaving behind her two defenseless children Lhachi Kuenzang (princess) and Kuentu Zangpo, alias Sey Kuentu Lekpa (the prince).

After trials and tribulations suffered at the hands of the evil stepmother Duem Hachang, the two children escape her clutches to rule the virtuous kingdom of Yue Pemachen. However, the evil stepmother finds the siblings again and attacks their peaceful kingdom. A battle ensues, and the virtuous prince kills the witch. Good triumphs evil, and, miraculously, Sey Kuentu Lekpa revives everyone except the witch with a snap of his fingers. The witch is said to be buried in a grave nine human heights deep. To ensure she remains there, a black stupa was built over the grave, which stands to this day as the black stupa or Chorten Nakpo.



Photo Courtesy: Ugyen Rinzin (tour guide)

THE 'IRON CHAIN BRIDGE' OF CHAZAM

For several centuries, a chazam or 'iron-chain bridge,' spanned the river below the Trashigang Dzong. Reputedly built by Thangthong Gyalpo, the great Himalayan Mahasiddhi, Architect, Engineer, Scholar, and Spiritual Master of the Chazampa School of Shangpa Buddhism, the bridge spanned about 100 meters in a time when the longest comparable bridges in the western world measured only 20 meters. It was built in the signature style of the Chazampa: two sets of interlinked chains connected the two ends of the bridge which were supplemented with walking surfaces fashioned from plant fibers.

In 1968, a flood ripped the foundations of the bridge which collapsed into the river. Eventually, the chains were retrieved and brought to the Trashigang Dzong, where they were kept, and neglected for many years. Other parts of the historic chain links were also salvaged and hung on the walls of the Chazam Lhakhang (temple) dedicated to Thangtong Gyalpo. Parts of the chain links were examined metallographically from 1978 to 1979 at the Confederate Technical College of Zurich, Switzerland, and the results published in a scientific brief titled 'Productions from Iron and Steel.'



Myths & Legends



Photo Courtesy: wrotetrips.wordpress.com

YETI: THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

The Yeti, or 'Abominable Snowman,' as pop culture deems it, remains a fabled creature for much of the world with little scientific evidence of its existence. However, in the Himalayas where the myth originated, and especially among the Brokpa communities that live within the bounds of the world's first national park protecting the Yeti, the creature looms in the imagination, nearly as real as the yaks they depend on for their daily subsistence. Called Drethpu or Migoe in the local language, the region's inhabitants describe it as a giant, hirsute, and ape-like being that lives above the snow line. Stories abound of human encounters with the elusive Yeti portrayed by some as gentle and kind or alternately ferocious and threatening. In this part of the world, they are the stuff of folktales and campfire stories, often considered a part of the natural ecosystem, at other times revered as supernatural beings that they must please with devotional offerings.



Photo Courtesy: Ugyen Rinzin, Tour Guide

MANI DANGRIM

In Galing village, there is an ancient Mani Dangrim (stupa) which is believed to have been constructed on top of the body of a Yeti killed by the villagers. Another Mani Dangrim located in Bhuna village is believed to contain the heart of a Yeti as its main relic. It is said that the Yeti was killed by an old man and his pet dog, when it came to attack the wife of the old man.

The Mani Dangrim is considered sacred and important for the community and one that protects them from anything evil. When the stupa was once robbed and desecrated by miscreants, a lot of misfortune fell on the community. However, everything became normal after it was renovated.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: karmablogspot.wordpress.com

LEGEND OF MEMEY RALANG

The story of Memey Ralang falls within the general animistic traditions in Bhutan of revering natural landforms and geological formations, a belief system that survives alongside formal Buddhism. Legend identifies the old spirit Memey Ralang as an unusual-looking mountain with a flat top that bears his name in Phongmey, Trashigang.

In a former manifestation as chukpo (wealthy landowner) Jampay Wangpo, Memey Ralang engaged in an amorous conflict with Shar Dunglay, a rival mountain deity from nearby Dirang, in Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh, India). A fight ensued, in which Shar Dunglay cut off Memey Ralang's head and brought it to Tawang. The corpse, sans head, was carried by a certain Memey Masang, another animistic spirit, from the eastern battlefield back west toward Trashigang. The rope broke loose near Phongmey, and there the old spirit remained, transmogrified into the mountain with the flat top seen today. People still visit the natural landforms described as the marks left by the rope on the mountain to this day.



Photo Courtesy: bhutantimes.bt

THE PHALLUS OF MERAK

The nomadic settlement of Merak is replete with stories of mysticism and the legendary exploits of their guardian deity Ama Jomo. One such spiritual legacy takes one to a traditional two-storied house of a local nomad, which, unlike the norm, is not a temple. It houses one of the most important relics, a meter-long wooden phallus, which is believed to have been brought and placed at the present location by Ama Jomo during the exodus of the Brokpa community from Tibet.

The phallus is kept in the attic of this very old house and the villager's efforts to relocate it to the village temple were met with ominous signs after which they continued to keep the relic at the same place. The house is considered so sacred that pilgrims can visit only if they have not eaten meat. It is said evil will befall upon the community, if these customary vows are not adhered to. An annual ritual is performed to preserve the relic's sanctity and invoke its powers to bless their community.



Festivals

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: karmablogspot.wordpress.com

TRASHIGANG TSHECHU

The largest annual religious festival in eastern Bhutan bursts forth with pomp and ceremony, as monks wearing masks and colorful swirling brocades enact episodes from the life of Padmasambhava, the patron saint of the Himalayas. Festivities usually draw a diverse range of people representing the various ethnic communities in the region, as colorful as the dancers themselves. The Brokpa people of Merak and Sakteng stand out from the crowd with their colorful fabrics, unique headgear and tunics of spun yak hair and raw silk.

Alongside the religiously symbolic and sacred mask dances, the festival includes traditional folk songs and dances. The highlight is the much-anticipated unfurling of a giant silk appliqué scroll, known as a thongdrel, illustrating Guru Padmasambhava in his eight different manifestations. Another thongdrel depicting the Neten Chudrug (the 16 Arhats or Buddhist preceptors) is also displayed.



Photo Courtesy: bhutantimes.bt

THE 'TREASURE DANCE' OF SAKTENG

In the communities of Sakteng and nearby Borangman, specially trained men, 18 to 60 years in age, perform a secret 'treasure dance' or terchham, once every four years. The dance is part of a historical enactment that preserves the collective memories of these communities and their origins in Tibet; their forced migration to eastern Bhutan in ancient times and their settlement in the peaceful valleys of the kingdom.

After their performances, the dancers, wearing little but their skeleton masks, bless the villagers and their homes and accept offerings of food and gifts in kind. The people believe that their gifts to the naked dancers quell misfortune, sickness, and untimely death.



Photo Courtesy: bhutantimes.bt

TOKSHINGMANG RAIN DANCE

In Tokshingmang village, dancers wearing skull masks and carrying wooden phalluses in their hands perform a unique annual dance to propitiate the spirits for rain in the upcoming cultivation season. Called Kengchham, people also believe the dance wards off difficulties and obstacles for the entire community and generates auspicious conditions for the practice of the Buddha Dharma. Dancers accompany the village community members who carry religious texts on their backs while completing a circumambulation of the village.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, yelhabhutantoursa

LOINCLOTH DANCERS

In a ceremonial purification dance performed at Yonphu, the site of an ancient temple in the Trashigang district, the performers emerge wearing only their loincloths. A story goes that when the temple's founder, a direct descendant of the spiritual treasure revealer Tertön Pema Lingpa, introduced the dance in its stark, naked form, the local inhabitants were too flustered to come out of their homes to watch the dance. Therefore, later the dance adopted a loincloth to cover the lower part of the body.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: bhutanyeganorpheltours.com

ACHAY LHAMO CHHAM

Included in UNESCO's representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity, this dance is part of an operatic performance that is well known in the Himalayas. Composed by the 14th to 15th-century yogi, bridge builder, and forger of iron chains, Drubthob Thangthong Gyalpo, the dance played a significant role in the religious celebrations of Tibet and in the northeastern parts of Bhutan, where it survives today.

The lore about the origins of the Achay Lhamo opera says the Chazampa or "Iron Bridge Builder" embarked on a project of building bridges over dangerous rivers and treacherous routes to make crossings safe for travelers, but he found himself at a lack of funds, labor and resources. So he recruited seven sisters, and taught them the Achay Lhamo songs and choreographed their dance, while playing the drums and cymbals himself. When they took the show on the road, as a sort of traveling benefit concert, fees collected went toward paying for the construction of bridges across the region. The dancers became revered and people called them Achay Lhamo, or 'the Celestial Sisters,' which stuck as a description both of their physical grace and beauty and the exquisite nature of the dance.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sangay Jmwo

YAK CHHAM

The people of Merak and Sakteng perform this dance to honor the local protector of livestock, Thoepa Gali, and as an appreciation of the tremendous role that yaks play in their lives. The dancers wear yak costumes, replete with bovine masks, horns and a four-legged “body” with a shaggy covering that completes the illusion. They sway in exaggerated representations of how a yak moves, nudging audience members and delighting them to the instrumental music and traditional lyrics celebrating the simple joys of the herding life. Whenever approached by the “yaks” during performances, spectators offer them white silk khadars, traditional scarves of felicitation, which make the yaks happy, causing them to display affection with their nudging horns and flirtatious dancing. Other mask dancers, who complete a series of intricate, trance-like solos, accompany the Yak Chham dancers.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: Fb, saktenggewogadminstration

DUNCHANG IN BROKPA COMMUNITY

Dunchang involves a gathering of people where the main purpose is to consume alcohol, usually Ara (locally brewed alcohol), and celebrate an event or occasion together. In the semi-nomadic Brokpa community of Merak and Sakteng, this custom is vigorously pursued to this day.

This celebration takes place when family members and friends meet and gather after a long time such as when the Brokpa household, along with their cattle, moves from their village homes to pasturelands far away. The drinking soon gives way to merriment such as singing and dancing and, quite often than not, alcohol-induced emotional moments. The celebration usually goes on past mid-night or, sometimes, till the early hours of the morning.

Dunchang reinforces bonds between families, relatives and friends. For some, it is also an occasion for courtship which eventually culminates into enduring love and marriage.



Photo Courtesy: bigstockphoto.com

THE NGAKPA OF DRUBKHANG

Of Bhutan's several strands of Buddhist sects and practices, the Ngakpa (yogi) stands out with his/her unique style of dress and deportment. They sport long hair, usually bundled into a knot, and wear white skirt and red and white shawl. This contrasts with the skirt, maroon shawl and shaved heads of other monks. The Ngakpa may live as a householder rather than a renounced monk. In fact, the Ngakpa ordination is non-monastic and non-celibate but with its own set of vows. They function as teachers, spiritual leaders, healers, ritual specialists and contemplative practitioners all over communities in eastern Bhutan. The region's strong tradition of Gomchen, lay monk, is closely associated with the Ngakpa.

The Ngakpa practitioners are widespread in Wamrong with the Goenpa (monastery) in Drubkhang village serving as their main base. Historically, there were numerous influential Ngakpa figures including the founder of Tibetan Medicine, Yutok Yonten Gampo, one of the greatest Dzogchen masters of all time, Longchenpa, the influential 18th century teacher, Jigme Lingpa, and Dudjom Jigdrel Yeshey Dorji in the 20th century.



Photo Courtesy: efratnakash.com

Photo Courtesy: joshuaproject.net

ETHNIC GROUPS

Trashigang comprises several distinct ethnic communities. The Tshangla people, believed to be amongst the oldest settlers of the region, speak its dominant language, called Tshangla-lo, after the community's name. Two other minority tongues, the East Bodish "Dakpa," and the Southern Bodish Brokpa are also spoken in the far eastern parts of the district.

Other ethnic communities besides the Tshangla people are Kurtoeps (recent migrants from Lhuentse), Khengpas (migrants from Zhemgang), Bramis (migrants from Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh), and the highlanders or Brokpas of Merak and Sakteng. The Brokpas are among the most visually arresting, distinguished by their unique dress and customs.



Photo Courtesy: amenbhutan.com

EMO CHILÉY: AN ENDURING SONG FROM THE HIGHLANDS

Emo Chiléy is a hymn dedicated to Ama Jomo, the tutelary deity of the nomadic herders of Merak and Sakteng. Endemic to the Brokpa ethnic groups, the natives believe the song was composed and initially sung by their guardian deity.

Oral accounts have it that the people of Merak and Sakteng trace their ancestral roots in the Tsona region of southern Tibet. The community is said to have lived under the reign of a wicked chieftain who ordered his subjects to flatten a mountain that was obstructing the sun from shining on his palace.

Intimidated by this seemingly unattainable task, the subjects then rebelled and beheaded the chieftain and fled after Ama Jomo suggested it was easier to cut-off the head of a person than flattening a mountain. The runaway community then arrived at present day Merak and Sakteng where they settled.

The womenfolk sing the soulful Emo Chiléy every year during Jomo Lhasöl, a three-day ritual held on the 21st day of the 7th lunar calendar.



Nye (Sacred sites)



Photo Courtesy: guyoumtsalos.blogspot.com

DHANGLING TSHO

Locals revere this small glacial reservoir in the mountains above Khaling, in Trashigang, as a holy lake. A rigorous eight-hour hike attracts winter pilgrims and hiking enthusiasts to the lake. For local farmers seeking the blessings of old ‘Memey’ Dhangling—folklore personifies the lake as a grandfatherly mountain deity—the lake confers luck, protection, material success, healthy livestock and a bountiful harvest.

Local legends say Memey Dhangling came with the Brokpas of Merak and Sakteng from Tsona in Tibet as a companion to (and a sibling of) their protectress, Ama Jomo. They believed that the old spirit spent the colder winter months in the relative warmth of the southern foothills, a migratory pattern that was historically adopted by the people of the region.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Kangpar Times

CHENLA NYE

This popular pilgrimage site draws hundreds of devotees each year who come to pray at the unique rock piles and geological formations on this prominent ridge at approximately 4,000 meters above sea level, near the Trashigang-Samdrup Jongkhar border. Visitors are inspired by what they take to be miraculous imprints of animals and holy relics on the rocks. The scenic spot is also said to have been visited by Guru Padmasambhava and other sages of antiquity. Some people claim to have seen the traditional Buddhist eight symbols of good fortune, or Tashi Dhargye, on the rays of the rising sun from a certain vantage point on the mountain.



Photo Courtesy: denkarsgetaway.com

DEKILING NYE

The Neykhang in Changmi village is associated with Tsampa Choeje Drukpa. It is said that when a few elderly men were at the site, the spiritual master Tsampa Choeje Drukpa appeared from nowhere and informed that the place should be considered sacred as per the orders of Guru Rinpoche. It is said that the master then conducted special rituals, which were followed by several marvelous incidents. Thus, the place was revered and considered sacred as it was blessed by Guru Rinpoche through a famous spiritual master.



Photo Courtesy: denkarsgetaway.com

JOMO KUNGKHAR

Jomo Kungkhar, at more than 4,500 meters altitude, facing Merak is the sacred mountain that is considered as the abode of Ama Jomo who is worshipped by the Brokpas as their protecting deity. Once a year during autumn, the inhabitants hike to the glorious mountain to perform rites and rituals and thus pay homage to the local deity. The local people stay around the vicinity until the ritual is over. Usually the rituals are performed for two days.

Jomo Kungkhar is known for several sacred lakes and 'Nye' of Ama Jomo and Guru Rinpoche. In fact, the mythical life and deeds of Ama Jomo can be seen in the form of impressions over rocks throughout the valley.

For the people of Merak, corpses cannot be cremated because the polluted air would offend Ama Jomo, and they cannot cut down trees or pollute the area near Jomo Kungkhar, otherwise there will be "storms and heavy rains". Likewise, the Brokpa of Sakteng are not allowed to cut trees in the mountains surrounding Lake Tsonong Gomba out of respect for Ama Jomo.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Sonam Y Pem

CYPRESS TREE AT KHALING GOENPA AND THE FIG TREE OF BARTSHAM

A large Bhutan Weeping Cypress (*Cupressus corneyana*) tree at Khaling Goenpa is believed to have grown from the walking stick of Gyalsey Ganapati (1685-1710), who assumed the post of Druk Desi and Je Khenpo simultaneously in 1705 and died at the age of 25. The local people have high regard for this tree and believe that death and misfortune would occur if the tree is harmed. The tree - 64.3 meters in height is estimated to be more than 200 years old.

Another tree of note is the Roxburgh (*Ficus oligodon*) tree below Muktangkhar village in Bartsham Gewog. It is believed that the tree, about 220 years old, grew from the walking stick at the spot where Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel had rested while traveling from Ramjar to Trashigang dzong. The tree is revered and protected by the nearby communities.

The third such tree – Chir Pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) - at Tsharong Ney in Udorong supposedly grew from the walking stick of Guru Rinpoche.



MECNHU



Photo Courtesy: uwice.gov.bt

DHONPHANGMA MENCHHU

This natural medicinal spring is a 30-minute drive from Khaling, a short hike downhill from the road at Dhonphangma. Locals and travelers plying the north-south highway wash their heads in its water to feel its curative effects. According to local accounts, the spring gained reputation for its healing effects when a traveler passing through experienced a severe headache, and stopped to wash his head in its water. Apparently, the traveler saw a female apparition directing him to its water before disappearing. When the man subsequently felt better, he took the vision as a supernatural sign of its healing powers. People believe water from this spring helps those suffering from dizziness and headaches, and other similar ailments. It's still relatively unknown among the larger population beyond the local communities.



Photo Courtesy: uwice.gov.bt

KHABTEY MENCHHU

The lukewarm water of the Khabtey Menchhu, on the road to Rangjung, is a 15-minute drive from the old Trashigang town. Its water is reputedly effective in helping cure joint pains, backaches, fever, arthritis and, sometimes, tuberculosis.



Monasteries & Stupas



Photo Courtesy: vymaps.com

YONPHU LHAKHANG

Before its founder built this temple, a subterranean lake inhabited by a nine-headed serpent named Shaza Tsimaradho plagued the local inhabitants. The temple's founder, a powerful traveling mendicant from Tibet (sometimes described as Guru Padmasambhava himself) subjugated the serpent and transformed her into a protective deity of the temple.

Unlike others, this temple's main shrine and altar are in the basement, purportedly forming a seal above the location where the lake existed. Here, visitors can view terma (treasure statues) recovered from another nearby lake. They depict Garab Dorji, a semi-historical figure revered as the first human to receive spiritual transmissions from the Bodhisattva Vajrasattva; Amitayus, the Bodhisattva of Infinite Life and Light; and the feminine Bodhisattva of Compassion, Tara.

Other artifacts include an interesting La-do ('soul-stone') of the female deity Dorji Phagmo (Vajravarahi), hand imprints of the treasure revealing saint Tertön Pema Lingpa on a rock, and antique painting of Gonpo Maning Nagpo, an emanation of the fierce indigo-colored deity Mahakala.



Photo Courtesy: bayuel.com

YONPHULA LHAKHANG

Lama Karpo, alias Lama Tshewang Penjor, built the temple after he had recurring visions of Guru Padmasambhava. He was a disciple of Dudjom Jigdrel Yeshe Dorji who gave him the name "Lama Karpo". Before he met his teacher, Lama Karpo went to Tibet to study Tantric practices. Meditating in a cave near Paro Taktshang, Lama Karpo heard the statue of Guru Padmasambhava speak. In his later years, the lama returned to Trashigang to establish the Yonphula monastery at its current location, at approximately 2,700 meters above sea level.

The Buddha's statue in the temple is the main relic, which was crafted by Lama Sonam Zangpo with the measurements brought from the Jowo temple in Lhasa, Tibet.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: bayuel.com

KHALING LHAKHANG

This is a three-storyed temple overlooking the Khaling valley, founded in the 17th century by Gyalsey Ganapati, alias Je Kuenga Gyeltshen. He was the first reincarnation of Jampal Dorji, son of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the Great Unifier of Bhutan. The relics of this temple include a statue of Buddha Sakyamuni, ancient texts, a statue of an Indian Pundit rescued from the ruins of a temple in Thungkhar in lower Trashigang valley; ancient thongdroels or appliqué paintings of Avalokiteshvara and Guru Padmasambhava; corals, ting cha (a ritual implement) and ceremonial cups used by the founder.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Merak Goendey

GENGO LHAKHANG

Buchung Chapa Zangpo, a son of the renowned Himalayan Mahasiddha Drubthob Thangtong Gyalpo, built this temple in Merak in the 15th century. At the age of 25, as prophesied by his father, Chapa Zangpo retrieved a chakphur (ritual dagger) from a lake in present-day north India. Visitors to the temple can see the embalmed remains of the temple's founder, the sacred dagger, eight holy stupas, and Geytong Sergi Begbum (holy texts written in ink made of gold dust). Inhabitants from the nearby Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh allegedly stole the skull and the right arm of the founder's mummified body



Photo Courtesy: pinterest.es

RANGJUNG MONASTERY

This monastery in Rangjung, north Trashigang, is the religious headquarters of Dungsey Garab Rinpoche, a scion of the Dudjom Tersar, branch of Vajrayana Buddhism. The largest monastery complex and spiritual hub in eastern Bhutan, the monastery was built as a replica of Mindrolling monastery in India, once a major seat of Nyingma Buddhism in Tibet. Several hundred monks pursue their religious studies here and its branch, a nunnery, located a few kilometers uphill, serves women practitioners from across the country.

It is believed that the malignant spirits which harbored in the locality of Rangjung was subdued by the father of the temple's founder, Dungsey Thinley Norbu Rinpoche.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: tashipenjore.blogspot.com

RADHI LHAKHANG

The region's revered supernatural deity, Ama Jomo, built Namdru Choling Lhakhang in Radhi, allegedly while en-route leading her people, the Brokpas, who were fleeing persecution in Tibet to Trashigang's Merak and Sakteng valleys. Trongsa Dronyer Ugyen Dorji later renovated the temple in the early 20th century. Its sacred relics include a Threngma (rosary) made of human bones, and a Kochab (woman's ceremonial belt) left by Ama Jomo. There is also a terma ('treasure statue') of the Buddha and statues of Ama Jomo and Memey Dangling, which are displayed to the public once every year.



Photo Courtesy: bayuel.com

CHADOR LHAKHANG

Chador Lhakhang in Bartsham is known for its holy relic, a finger size statue of Chador or Chana Dorji (Vajrapani) discovered by Terton Pema Lingpa from Yutsho Lake at Khar in Pemagatshel, and subsequently brought to Bartsham village. In 1907, its caretakers took the statue to the Trongsa Dzong and placed it in a temple there, alongside other religious images. While attending to daily religious rituals, the monk responsible repeatedly found other statues near the Bartsham relic strewn about and the tiny statue's face turned toward Bartsham, a fact that was interpreted as an omen directing the need for it to be reinstated to Bartsham, which happened in due course. The statue's reputation as a protective deity spread far and wide and, today, people from all walks of life come to offer their prayers and seek its blessings.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, karmatshewang1992

KUPI JIGTSAM

Sangdag, a son of the famous Terton Pema Lingpa, built this temple in the 15th century on the top of a hill in Yangneer and named it KUPI JIGTSAM - meaning 'Temple of the Singing Cuckoo (the bird in local Tshangla language is called "Kupi").' One can come across the claw prints of the cuckoo on a large stone next to the temple which the local people believe symbolizes that the cuckoo was not an ordinary bird and indicated Sangdag to construct the temple and leave it behind as a legacy.

Visitors can see the embalmed remains and a statue of the temple's founder; a stupa considered a terma ('holy treasure'); statues of the Buddha, Guru Padmasambhava, Avalokiteshvara, Guru Dorji Drolo (a fearsome form of Padmasambhava), Terton Pema Lingpa, Drubthob Thangtong Gyalpo, and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. A small statue of the Buddha, a farmer found while ploughing his field nearby adds to the temple's sanctity.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Thromang Lhakhang Reconstruction Fund Raising Page

THROMANG LHAKHANG

A small but highly important temple, Thromang Lhakhang in Chaling village, north of Trashigang town, has a fascinating story. According to legend, while leading the Brokpa people from Tibet to Merak and Sakteng in ancient prehistory, Ama Jomo tossed two precious volumes of the Buddha's teachings—the Bum and the Jatongpa—in the air. Based on a premonition she had, the scriptures landed on the roof of a small hut belonging to an old woman in Chaling. The old woman subsequently built the small temple to house the two sacred scriptures.

Today, besides those two sacred texts, one can also see other religious books and 'treasure statues' of Zambala, the Bodhisattva of Prosperity, and Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. In keeping with its origins, a statue of the deity Ama Jomo also graces its shrine.

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Photo Courtesy: bhutanhomestay.com

LAMAI GOENPA

Lamai Goenpa in Kangpara is the seat of the famous 20th-century lama, painter and composer of religious verses, Moenlam Rabzang. The lama, who was a talented artist, became well-known for simultaneously painting with both hands. There is a large-scale floor-to-ceiling mural he painted in this way at the holy temple complex of Kurje, Bumthang.

A hermitage built sometime in the 9th century during the time of Tibetan prince Lhasay Tsangma existed near Lamai Goenpa, which is surrounded by Chenla, a sacred mountain pass. The construction of Lamai Gonpa was funded by Trashigang Dzongpoen (governor) Sey Dopola. In 1986, Gyeltshen Trulku took over and renovated the monastery.

Lamai Goenpa houses a rare statue of Tshepamay. The footprints of an old woman who is said to have devoted her life to spiritual prostrations can be seen on the planked floor inside the monastery.



Photo Courtesy: touristlink.com

BREMUNG LHAKHANG

Kuenga Wangpo, a son of the Treasure Discoverer Tertön Pema Lingpa who lived in the 15th century, founded the Bremung Lhakhang in Bidung. On his deathbed, Kuenga Wangpo instructed his followers to keep his mortal remains in the temple. The local inhabitants preserved his embalmed remains in the temple according to his wishes. Also in the temple are images of Pema Lingpa, Guru Padmasambhava, a small 'treasure statue' of the Buddha and a drilbu (ritual bell) used by Kuenga Wangpo.



Photo Courtesy: tashipenjore.blogspot.com

PEMA PHENDEYLING GOENPA

The people of Yangneer, with the help of benefactors, built this beautiful stupa, which overlooks a picturesque location with a view of several local villages. The stupa was built as a seal against natural disasters and calamities, for the wellbeing of Bhutanese, and to celebrate the ascension to the throne of Bhutan's current and Fifth King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. It also pays tribute to 100 years of Bhutanese monarchy and the kingdom's transition to constitutional democracy.

The stupa is believed to be an exact replica of Dorjidhen or the Bodhgaya stupa in India.

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Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Ge Nye

TSENGMI LHAKHANG

Built by Tsengmi Gyalpo, a local lord who held sway over the region before eastern Bhutan's unification with the rest of the country, this temple overlooks Gongthung village in Trashigang. He built the structure as a place of local worship, and to stop a nearby Nyedag (malicious nature spirit), from disturbing the peace of the inhabitants.

Among the sacred relics at this temple are religious terma statues of Guru Thromthung, and Guru Tong (one thousand smaller images of Guru Padma-sambhava placed, Russian-doll-like, inside a larger statue). In addition, there are 21 statues of Dolma (the feminine Bodhisattva of Compassion) and a statue of Tandin Yab-Yum (the horse-headed deity Hayagriva in sexual union with his consort).



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Phuntsho Pelmo

RANGSHIKHAR LHAKHANG

Rangshikhar Lhakhang is the abode of the well-known Buddhist teacher from the area, Rangshikhar Rinpoche. Most people visit the temple to receive his blessings and teachings. Roughly 10 km north of Trashigang town, this temple is an excellent destination to take a short, scenic drive from the district center, followed by a hike from nearby Lingkhar Lodge.

The monastery occupies a serene spot above Rangshikhar village. A good idea is to combine a visit to this monastery with a local home-stay at nearby Rangshikhar Naktshang (large country manor). The visitor can sit in the monastery and meditate for a duration to get a taste of the tranquil Bhutanese country life.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Ge Nye

PHIMSONG LHAKHANG

This temple nestled in the center of Phimsong village is dedicated to Delok Sangay Choezom and serves as the place where villagers gather for the annual tshechu (rituals/festivals) and other important religious events. Delok Sangay Choezom (born in Kanglung), built the temple and named it Sanga Pemagatshel Lhakhang.

The exact year of the temple's founding is unknown. It has two sanctuaries, and the upper one has the main relic of Choelong Trulsum-Tempa. There are also images of Guru Padmasambhava, Tara and Delok Sangay Choezom herself. Twelve volumes of Bum (Satashastrika Prajnaparamita) and large painted murals are other treasures housed in this temple.



Photo Courtesy: bayuel.com

PHONGMEY LHAKHANG

This temple was built by a vassal of Trongsa Ponlop Ugyen Wangchuck, who later ascended the golden dragon throne and became His Majesty Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, the first hereditary king of Bhutan. The Penlop sent the temple's founder, Phub Tshering, originally from Bumthang, as the Drungpa of Phongmey, a governing official under the Penlop's authority. While no records exist of the exact date he built the temple, educated guesses about the tenure of Drungpa Phub Tshering puts the approximate time frame around 1890. Locals further attest that it is about 130 years old, which supports this thesis.

Besides the temple, the Drungpa also built several Naktshangs, large buildings meant to house the living quarters of nobility and provide storehouses for grains, textiles, and other forms of tribute collected as taxes. The Lhakhang houses the biggest statue of Chuchi Zhey in eastern Bhutan.

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Photo Courtesy: zuririnpoche.com

KARMA THEGSUM DECHENLING MONASTERY

This acclaimed monastery, located at Barshong, some distance from the town of Khaling, is the only religious building in the country painted in the Karma Ghadri style, a combination of Tibetan, Indian and Chinese art forms. Consecrated in 2010, it is built on a place known as Sangchen and the surrounding localities are known to be rich in iron ores.

The main shrine hall houses three giant statues of the Buddha Sakyamuni, Padmasambhava, and the 8th Karmapa. Other statues include Avalokiteshvara, the Green Tara, Vajrapani, the Medicine Buddha, Vairasattva, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, and Terton Pema Lingpa. Huge frescoes up to 25 feet tall cover the four walls of the main shrine. The monastery has beautifully carved beams and pillars bearing the sacred inscriptions 'Om Mani Padme Hum' and 'Karmapa Khenno.' Auspicious symbols of Buddhism cover the doors and window frames of this remarkable temple complex.



Photo Courtesy: heavenlybhutan.com

KHARDUNG ANIM DRATSHANG

Dungsey Garab Rinpoche built Khardung Anim Dratshang as a branch of the nearby Rangjung Woesel Choeling Monastery. Women of all ages pursue their religious studies here, driven by their will to benefit sentient beings. Near the nunnery, a sparsely furnished guest house provides the curious traveler an opportunity to visit and deepen their spiritual practice for short durations. Visitors can also attend daily prayers with the nuns and gain basic insights into the daily rituals and rhythms of Buddhist practice.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, BORANGTSE GOENPA

BORANGTSE GOENPA

Borantse Goenpa (temple on a forest tip) in Sakteng is located at an altitude of about 3,000 meters. It is roughly an hour's hike from Sakteng village. The disciples of Lam Tenpai Droma, who built the Tsholung Lhakhang, vowed to build a temple in such a location from where the Goenpa would be visible from both sites. As destined, the disciples found a suitable location where it stands today.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Phuntsho Wangdi

PALRI BUDDHA PARK

Envisioned as a place of peace, sanctity, and reflection in Wamrong, where there are few religious monuments to inspire and attract visitors, the Palri Buddha Park draws thousands of devout Buddhists and other visitors every year.

Spread throughout the park are scenes from traditional Buddhist iconography such as the 12 significant deeds of the Buddha, the young prince Siddhartha practicing archery, and the ancient yogi, Milarepa, meditating in a cave.

The Twelve Deeds of the Buddha are: the descent from Tushita, entering the mother's womb, taking birth, becoming skilled in various arts, delighting in the company of royal consorts, developing renunciation and becoming ordained, practicing austerities for six years, proceeding to the foot of the Bodhi tree, overcoming Mara's hosts, becoming fully enlightened, turning the wheel of Dharma, and passing into Mahaparinirvana.

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Photo Courtesy: insidebigstory.blogspot.com

CHORTEN GATHPU

A massive stupa in the heart of Udorong village, locally known as Chorten Gathpu, is named after its sheer size and mysticism. It is said to have been built by the second Pedseling Trulku, Jigme Tenpai Gyeltshen. The stupa is revered for its powers to thwart natural disasters and misfortunes caused by the “four elements” of nature and bestows blessings to cattle of the local farmers.

Another account says that the stupa was built by a widow and her three sons by begging for land from a pious local landlord. This story has a parallel with the Boudanath Stupa in Nepal which was built under similar circumstances. Chorten Gathpu is also designed in the mold of the Boudanath stupa.

It is believed that the stupa appeared in the dream of the 2nd Pedseling Trulku Jigme Tenpai Gyeltshen. The Buddhist master thus made an arduous journey from Bumthang to locate the stupa and consecrate it.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Brekhapa

MANICHILO

A story goes that the two gigantic stupas in Brekha in south Trashigang is the result of a pious act of a farmer and his nephew who laboured for several years to build them.

The nephew’s stupa is smaller but, before it could be completed, his mother passed away and thereafter the monument came to be known as the “stupa of sorrow”. The farmer’s stupa was larger and known as Manichilo (bigger stupa) in local dialect.

A local belief has it that a mithuna was embalmed inside Manichilo as an offering. The local people also believe that, during auspicious days, one can hear the sound of religious rituals being performed inside the stupa.



Photo Courtesy: agefotostock.com

WAMRONG ZANGTOPELRI

Wamrong Zangtopelri temple is a must-stop destination along eastern Bhutan's 180-kilometre Trashigang-Samdrup Jongkhar highway. The three-storied temple built in a traditional Bhutanese architecture is a key attraction for the tiny hillside town of Wamrong, where travelers along the highway stop for lunch and refreshment.

The temple is the venue for the region's biggest religious festival, Tshechu, which is celebrated in November and December each year. The people from the surrounding villages attend the colorful festival to witness the mask and folk dances, receive blessings and mingle with family members, relatives and fellow-villagers.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Druk Ge Nye

MONGLING GOENPA

Believed to be about a century old, Mongling Goenpa in Rongthung was the seat of Lam Molam Rabzang, a Kagyu Lama who was born in Tshangkha, Mangde valley, in 1878. Lam Monlam Rabzang traveled to the Kham region of Tibet and received teachings from the highly accomplished mendicant Tokden ShākyaShrī (1853-1919), including extensive lessons on the texts of Kagyu traditions.

Lam Monlam Rabzang returned to Bhutan and remained in Trashigang as the religious guide to Dzongpon (provincial governor) Dopola. He built several temples in Trashigang, including Mongling Goenpa. He also established the Lamai Goenpa monastery in Kangpara, where he resided until he passed away in 1945.

Owned by the community of Rongthung, Mongling Goenpa has statues of Palden Lhamo and Guru Rinpoche.

HISTORY & CULTURE



Photo Courtesy: bayuel.com

KHAPTI KITHPHU GOENPA

Located on a plateau from where the villages of Bidung, Bartsham, Yangneer, Radhi and others can be seen, the Goenpa was built by one of the 108 Drupthops (Yogi) of Kuenzang Chophel, a disciple of the 9th Abbot (Je-Khenpo) Gyalwa Shakya Rinchen. While at Larja Drakarcholing in Mongar, Kuenzang Chophel sent one of the Drupthops, Thomi Dorji, to Khapti to build the monastery in 1837.

The main relics of the Goenpa are statues of Sangay Shacha Thupa, Chenrezig and Guru Rinpoche. These sacred relics are today housed in a Drupkhong (meditation house) just above the Goenpa. The old Goenpa was later renovated and a Sheldra (centre for Buddhist studies) was instituted.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Kuenga Tashi

RONGTHONG NAKTSHANG

Rongthong Naktshang (manor house) was built in 1930 by Trashigang Dzongpon (provincial governor) Thinley Tobgay, alias Sey Dopola, who is the great grandfather of the Queen of Bhutan, Her Majesty Jetsun Pema Wangchuck. Named as Rongthong Phuntsho Norbugang, the three-storied Naktshang, often cited as a fine specimen of Bhutanese architecture, houses the statues of Buddha Shakyamuni, Drubthob Thangthong Gyalpo and the 14th Karmapa, Kachap Dorji.

Sey Dopola rebuilt the Trashigang Dzong in 1939, and constructed Yonphula Lhakhang where he installed a replica of the statue of Lhasa Jowo. He also built Samten Choeling Lhakhang, renovated the historical Chazam (bridge) and introduced Rinchen Terzoed Wang (blessing) for the first time in Bhutan. Sey Dophola was born to Dzongpon Sonam Tshering and Chomo at Sugbee in Kurtoe in 1891. He died in 1952 in Bumthang where he had gone to attend the funeral rites of the second King of Bhutan.

Bhutan's biggest river, Drangme chhu.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Inside Bhutan

Vivo V9



Other Attractions



Photo Courtesy: Fb, Kuenga Tashi

YONPHULA AIRPORT

Yonphula domestic airport, one of only four domestic airports in the country, is located near Sherubtse College in Trashigang. It serves as the only access by air to the six eastern districts of Bhutan. The airstrip was built in the 1960s. Set high on the gentle shoulder of the mountain, it remained unused for a long time. The Department of Civil Aviation renovated and expanded it in the early 2000s, making it a viable domestic airport at an elevation of 2,700 meters.

The Merak village, located at an altitude of 3,500 meters, is home to the semi-nomadic Brokpa community.



Photo Courtesy: Fb, MERAK HOME STAY



Photo Courtesy: agefotostock.com

Accommodations

ACCOMMODATIONS



Druk Deothjung Resort (D2)

Phomshing

Phone: +975 4 521440

Mobile: +975 17119909

E-mail: drukdeothjung@gmail.com

Amenities/facilities

- Airport transfer
- Bar
- Business centre
- Conference hall
- Foreign currency exchange
- Gift shop
- Mini library
- Wi-fi (free)

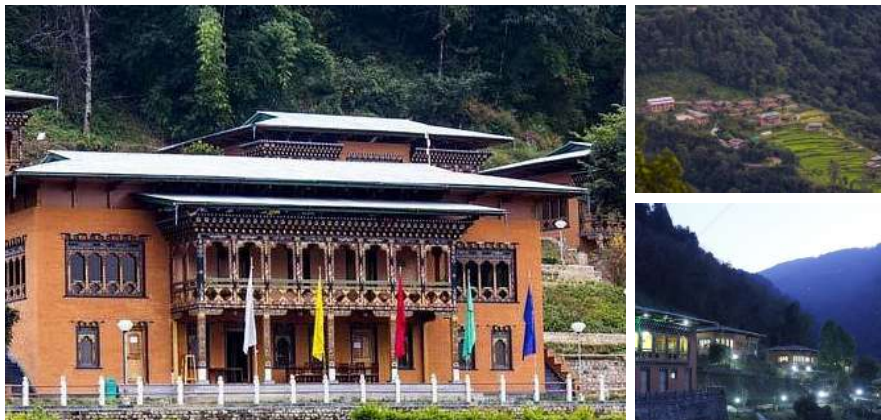
Restaurant

- A La Carte and Buffet
- Bhutanese, Chinese, Continental and Indian

Rooms

- Standard Deluxe Room 56
- Executive Suite Room 13
- Royal Suite Room 1
- Air conditioned rooms
- Attached bath
- Room heating
- Balcony

- Distance from Trashigang town (in kms): 2



Lingkhar Lodge

Lengkhar

Mobile: +975 77116767 / 77116768

E-mail: lingkharlodge@gmail.com

Amenities/facilities

- Airport transfer: charges apply
- Bar
- Business centre
- Conference hall
- Foreign currency exchange
- Gift shop
- Mini library
- Spa and fitness: hot stone bath
- Taxi service on call
- wi-fi (free)

Restaurant

- A La Carte and Buffet

- Bhutanese, Chinese, Continental and Indian

Rooms

- Standard 8
- Deluxe 9
- Suite 3
- Total number of rooms 20
- Attached bath
- cable TV
- Room heating

- Distance from Trashigang town (in kms): 10



Kelling Lodge

Trashigang town

Tel. No. +975-4-521145

Fax No. +975-4-521300

Amenities/services

- Bhutanese and Indian cuisine.
- 11 rooms
- Attached bath
- Restaurant and bar
- Money exchange
- Excellent views of the Trashigang valley



Hotel KC

Trashigang Town

Phone : +975 4 521264 / 521198

Mobile: +975 17967375

E-mail: hotelyeetsem01@gmail.com

Amenities/services

- Bar
- Business centre
- Conference hall
- Foreign currency exchange
- Gift shop

Restaurant

- A la carte and buffet
- Bhutanese, Continental and Indian

Rooms

Single	2
Double	17
Suite	2

- Attached bath
- Cable TV
- Room heating (on request)

Distance from Town (in kms): 0

ACCOMMODATIONS



Pema Choden Farmstay (VHS)

- Location:** Kangpara
Facilities: Basic, outdoor bathrooms and toilets
Surroundings: Lamai goenpa, Buddha's footprints, hikes in vicinity, villages
Contact: +975 17235373



Rangshikhar Naktshang House (VHS)

- Location:** Rangshikhar
Facilities: Indoor bathrooms, hot water, western-style toilets
Surroundings: Rangshikhar goenpa
Samchoeling goenpa
Contact: +975 17116766



Merak Homestay (VHS)

Location: Merak

Facilities: Basic, outdoor bathrooms and toilets

Surroundings: Gengu and Merak villages, trek route to Sakteng



Pema Homestay (VHS)

Location: Merak

Facilities: Indoor bathrooms, hot water, western-style toilets

Surroundings: Gengu and Merak villages, trek route to Sakteng

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ISBN-978-999996-893-6-2

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