



SOUTHERN CIRCUIT

Experience the Colours of Southern Bhutan



Tourism Council of Bhutan





About Bhutan

The Kingdom of Bhutan, a gem in the eastern Himalayas, areas 38,394 square km. and is populated with just little above 600,000. Looking from a natural side, Bhutan is a gem in the Himalayas. Fauna and flora flourishes in great varieties as the terrain rises from southern foothills (150m above sea level) to unclimbed peaks over 7000m.

Delve into the 8th century and follow the trails of Guru Padmasambhava's legendary travel through Bhutan. Legend says that he flew to the cliffs of Taktsang on the back of a tigress. Taktsang temples (Tiger's Nest), built on the cliffs above the valley of Paro, is one of the highest holy Buddhist spots in the world. Anybody with a taste of Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism will find Bhutan spiritually delightful.

The Dzong builder, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, unified the country under one rule in the 17th century. He codified a comprehensive system of laws and built dzongs that nowadays serves as religious and administrative centres. Pre-Buddhist faith in Bhutan was animism and nature worship. This animist tradition protected the uniqueness of Bhutan's social, cultural and ecological tradition.

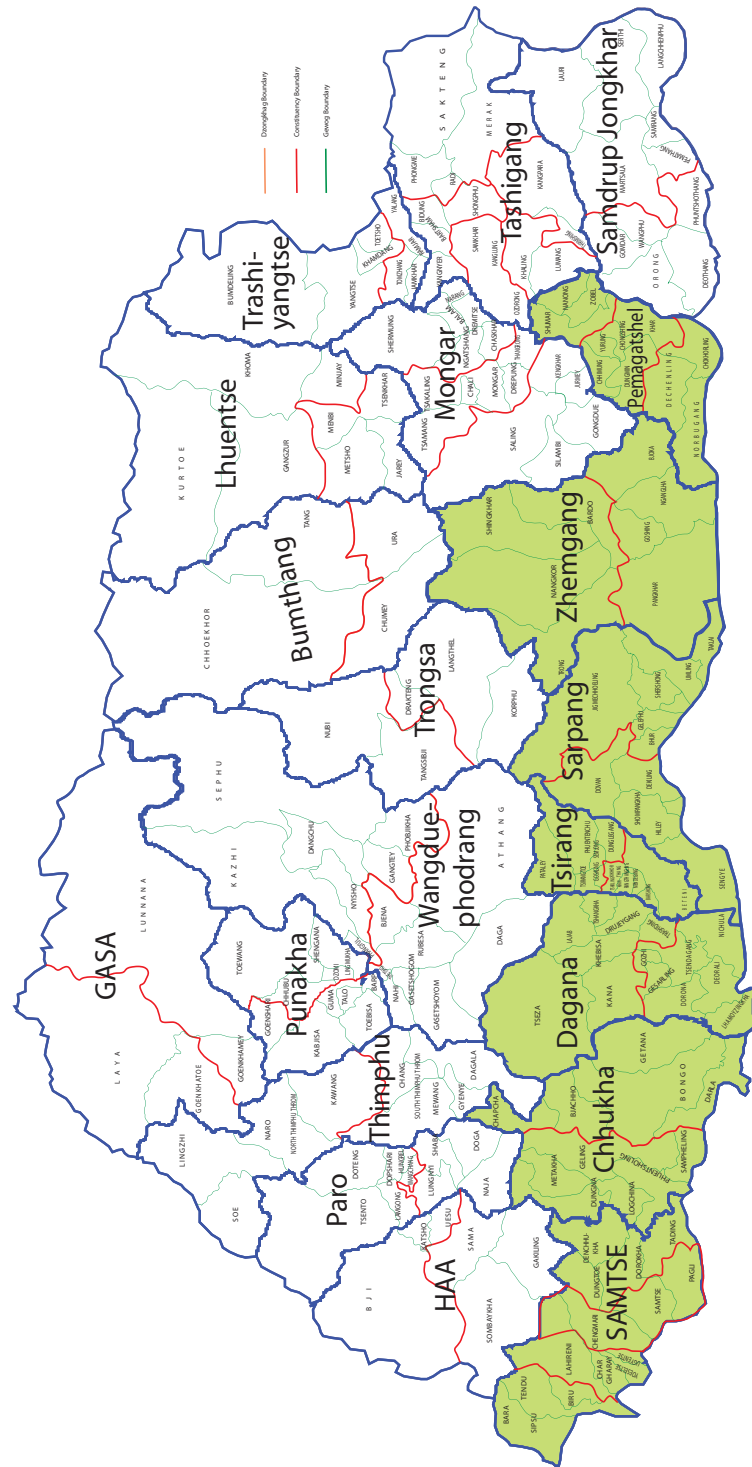
In the next two centuries, the nation was once again fragmented into regional fiefdoms with intermittent civil wars. At the end of the 19th century, the Trongsa governor, Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck, who then controlled the central and eastern regions, overcame all his rivals and united the nation. In 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck was unanimously enthroned as the 1st King thereby establishing a hereditary monarchy system. The Fifth King, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck now holds the rein.

One of the most striking physical features of Bhutan is its architecture. The characteristic style and colour of every building and house in the kingdom is a distinct source of aesthetic pleasure. Patterns of rich colours adorn walls, beams, pillars and doors in traditional splendour. Art and paintings are also important aspects of Bhutanese culture and they bear testimony to the spiritual depth of Bhutanese life. The festivals are also great social and spiritual ceremonies that awe both Bhutanese and visitors.

Nowhere in the Himalayas is the natural heritage more rich and varied than in Bhutan. Because of the deep traditional reverence which the Bhutanese have for nature, the kingdom is one of the leading countries in environmental conservation. Over 70% of Bhutan's land area is still under forest cover. Many parts of the country have been declared wildlife reserves, and are the natural habitats of rare species of both flora and fauna.

Opened for tourism in 1974, after the coronation of the Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Bhutan is perhaps the world's most exclusive tourist destination. The country still retains all the charm of the old world, and travellers experience the full glory of this ancient land as embodied in the monastic fortresses, ancient temples, monasteries and chortens which dot the countryside, prayer flags fluttering above farmhouses and on the hillsides, lush forests, rushing glacial rivers, and – perhaps most important of all – the warm smiles and genuine friendliness of the people. Each moment is special as one discovers a country which its people have chosen to preserve in all its magical purity.

Southern circuit



South circuit

The southern circuit is actually the ecological hub of the country. In this promotion we have highlighted the two districts of Sarpang and Zhemgang. Zhemgang is ideal for nature oriented tours though the cultural highlights are irresistible. The famous Dunmang hot spring is in Zhemgang district. The other hot spring that is highlighted is in Sarpang district. Other tour activities are the Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary, the Royal Manas National Park, the tropical fruits and numerous species of medicinal plants and the culture of the Khengpas and the Lhotsampas. The Lhotsampas are the ethnic race of Nepalese origin, settled in the southern part of Bhutan. Mostly Hindus, their rituals and festivals are very colourful.



Traversing the realm of Kheng culture

Inhabitants of Zhemgang are culturally called the Khengpas. The region remained closed to tourism for many years. In the recent years only a small part was opened for bird watching. This newly opened region is the jewel of tourism in Bhutan. Zhemgang people here are grouped under three regions of upper, middle and lower Kheng. If you are interested in the last of the animist traditions in Bhutan, this is the region. They invariably celebrate a number of shamanistic practices which is locally known as Bon. Khengpas are adept artisans and are known for their bamboo products like wine containers, baskets, matted bamboo carpets

and other cane products. In the good old days this region cultivated a substantial amount of cotton, a major part paid as tax to the government, besides textiles woven out of cotton. Historically there are traces of the advent of Guru Rinpoche (from the 8th century) though visible records can be seen mostly from the 15th century. Temples like Buli lhakhang in Buli village and Tharpa Choeling is associated with the treasure revealers Terton Pema Lingpa who is famous for the Peling tradition of Buddhism. The Bhutanese Royal Family is a direct descendent of Pema Lingpa. Traditionally, the Kheng region was divided into three regions of Chikhor (Uper Kheng), Nangkhor (Middle Kheng) and Tamachok (Lower Kheng).



Chikor (upper kheng)

Chikhor or upper Kheng comprised of eleven villages of Nimshong, Thashong, Zangling, Thrisa, Bardo, Khomshar, Langdurbi, Digala, Radhi, Wamling and Shingkar. All of these eleven villages fall in the upper Kheng.

Nangkor (middle kheng)

Nangkor or Middle Kheng consists of nine villages situated between the Mangde River and Dakphay and Dunmang villages. The villages are Dakphay, Norbugang, Kikhar,

Tali, Buli, Goling, Zholing, Nyakhar and Tsheldang. This region had four noble families in the past.

Tamachok/Matpala (lower kheng)

The villages of Bjokha, Dali, Panbang, Nangla, Goshing, Shidrong Toed, Phangkhar, Edi, Mamung, Gomphu, Subrang, Zurphel, Tshangla Jong and Berti below Tama and above Bjokha villages form the Tamachok or the Matpala villages.



	FESTIVAL	Season
1	Zhemgang Tsechu	Spring
2	Kharphe	Spring
3	Kaath	Autumn
4	Chodpa	Autumn

Experience the Colours of Sarpang festivals

The inhabitants of Sarpang are a mixture of almost every ethnic group in Bhutan comprising of the Sharchopas, Ngalops, Bumthaps, Khengpas, Kurtoeps and then Lhotshampas. The vastness of agricultural land has enticed many farmers to Sarpang. Majority of the inhabitants are the Lhotshampas and



nature worshippers which makes a great diversity of cultural experiences. The summer months are not recommended due to heat and humidity of the region. Let us reveal the colours of the fall festivities or mesmerize you with some animist rituals. Sarpang district is one of the newly opened destinations when Gelephu was made feasible for entry and exit of tourists. At the moment Gelephu is the only destination opened for cultural highlights.





Gelephug

Explore the South Circuit's Natural side

We often call the southern circuit as the hub of Bhutan's unique nature trips. Talk of Zhemgang, we have the endemic species of primates called the Golden Langur. Next we have the Rufous-necked Hornbill which is another speciality. It is the only circuit where we can watch wild gaurs, elephants, rhinos, tigers, clouded leopard and any you would want to see in a tropical jungle.

Flowers

Zhemgang's altitude rises from 300m to almost 3000m above sea level. This makes a good haven for flower enthusiasts from spring till early summer. Sarpang is basically a low land region and the best known flowers in these regions are the tropical orchids.

Birds

Summer is the bane of tourism in the southern circuit. Due to monsoon rains, tours to these regions can be restrictive. Otherwise spring, autumn and winter are ideal bird watching months in the southern circuit. Zhemgang

itself is a haven for many specialities in the Himalayas. Almost all the extinct species in the north-east Himalayas are still seen in the south circuit.

Wildlife

Highlights are endemic Golden Langur, tigers, clouded leopards, elephants, wild gaurs and many more. Manas is accessible from Zhemgang as well as from Sarpang. Excursions on the great Royal Manas Park and Kayaking on the Manas River is the highlight. As for Sarpang, the highlight will be Phibsoo Wildlife sanctuary. Do not expect 5 star hotels in these areas though tented camps will be readily available.

Treks

Explore the Kheng region on foot and you will be surprised to see a world you have not seen. Some villages still live traditionally in bamboo huts roofed in traditional bamboo leaves. Water is still being carried in small bamboo containers. The remoteness of Zhemgang region is itself a trekker's delight. Explore the unexplored that is the watch word. As for Sarpang the best trekking route available is the one to the Royal Manas National park.



	FESTIVAL	Season
1	Durga Puja	Autumn
2	Duseura	Autumn

Finding the Balance through body and spiritual wellness

Meditation retreat

If you are looking for advanced retreats then let the far-flung remote villages of Zhemgang give you the respite. The tranquillity and almost medieval agrarian life style will soothe anybody from a busy metropolitan life.

Hot spring therapy

Dumang in Zhemgang and Gelephu are the only hot springs in the south circuit.

Introducing the Royal Manas Ecotourism: Established in 1964, the Royal Manas National Park is the oldest park in the country. The royal decree of keeping forest cover between 60-70% has helped to preserve the sub-tropical ecosystem. Manas starts at 150m above sea level which is the lowest region in Bhutan. Manas is the best habitat for Tiger, Asian Elephant, Rhino, Leopard, Water Buffalo, Bison, Sambar, Hog Deer, Pigmy Hog, Python, King Cobra, and over 430 species of birds. Head for experiences and explore Manas on boat, elephant rides or on foot. There are many exciting places to visit and experience. We have drawn out an introductory access to Manas from Gelephu though one can also enter Manas from Trongsa by arriving to Gonphu.



Entering Manas from Gelephu

Gelephu (Sarpang district) Gomphu (Zhemgang)

Gelephu under Sarpang district, at one time, was called Hati Zar due to high population of elephants. Gelephu is at 280m above sea level and is the largest flat land in Bhutan. Take the 150km drive from Gelephu to Gonphu and enjoy the ascent from 280m-1450m. We pass through Surey village where mandarin and cardamom farming is the main cultivation. From Surey we can also see Jo Dungshing peak on clear days. This peak is the highest in the Black Mountain range. It will be nice to break the journey and camp at Chaplikhola which is under good forest cover. This is the northern most tip of the Royal Manas Park. The area gets maximum rainfall in the country. This makes the area a thriving sub-tropical ecosystem. This is the haven for wildlife such as tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, sambar, and large number of bird species.

Driving through Chaplikhola we continue through the forest until Tamala pass (2500m). There are few households here and halting here to look for Royal Bengal tigers would be a nice idea. This is the main tiger habitat.

Next we drive further to Tingtibi along the national highway. Tingtibi is located at an altitude of 600m in a narrow valley by the side of Mangdichu River (the river that runs



from the district of Trongsa and joins Manas). Tingtibi is also the junction where the Royal Manas Park boundaries meet the Jigme Singgye Wangchuck National Park.

Tingtibi is the best place to camp for bird watchers. From here we take the farm road to Gongphu. 50 kilometres of bumpy drive on a 4wd. Gongphu is also the crossroad from which one takes the two hours walk to Dunmany hot spring.

Gomphu – Mamung – Pantang

Gear up your bags and start the five hours walk to Pantang village. We will be descending almost 1200m. On the way stop by at Paibang and Mamung villages. Except for the few remnants of shifting cultivation, the forest cover is seen well preserved. From Mamung we get to the broad leaved evergreens all the way till Pantang located near the Mangdechhu River. It is quite a place to camp at 280m above sea level.

Pantang – Changna Zam

Take a gradual walk through Phangkhar village located on the other side of the Mangdechhu River. Continue through and cross to Goshing village using the suspension bridge called Phangkhar Zam. The next village is called Shilintey. The views are terrific but the steep drop from Shilintey to our camp is something to be careful of. It is so steep that a miscalculated step could lead to disaster.

Changnga Zam- Manas

We are heading to Panbang which functions as sub-district headquarter for surrounding Zhemgang villages. It takes three hours through open grasslands following the Mangdechhu River. On the way ask for the first village of Reepatey to avoid losing your trail. Once you reach Panbang the choice is three fold: you can walk, drive or take wooden boat ride to reach Manas epicentre. It is a 12km drive and may take another forty five minutes. On foot it might take few hours but the boat ride takes only thirty minutes. Many prefer boat rides to enjoy the scenic beauty and watch birds.

To Gelephu from Manas

Manas -Baltegurung

Start early to enjoy wildlife watch. We are heading for Sukunjan and then proceed to Baltegurung camp. Today is the day to watch water buffaloes and wild gaurs and other magnificent ungulates. We are walking through the grasslands which are ideal habitat for Tigers. This stretch starts from Galongkhola and ends within the Kanamakra vicinity. Within few hours we reach Goburkunda where a stream flows through. Let us stop here for lunch and also take an opportunity to watch wildlife. Many creatures come here to enjoy the benefits from this stream. After a good rest follow the trail to Sukunjan through the grassland. Continue to Baltegurung which is close to two hours from Sukunjan. The riverbeds of Baltegurung have some salt deposits and wild animals love to lick. The saltlick gives us a great opportunity to watch animals.

Baltegurung- Kanamakra

Start the day towards Teendoban which is close to two hours walk through the grassland. This is where you can watch wild elephants and also the rare Kaula trees. The bark of Kaula trees are used in indigenous medicine and are highly sought after. We are very close to the Indian borders so be



South Circuit Trek Routes

Name	Month for Flowers	Month for Birds	Months for Wildlife	Months for Scenic views
Upper Kheng	June-August	Through out	Through out	Spring, Autumn & Winter
Ura-Buli	April-June	Through out	Through out	Spring, Autumn & Winter
Royal Manas	Spring & Autumn	Through out	Through out	Spring, Autumn & Winter

alert. Sometimes tourists and poachers meet accidentally. This becomes a moment of scaring each other. From Teendoban we walk through the grassland till Kuklung where we luncheon by the riverside.

After lunch walk for another two hours through grassland and some forests of hardwood trees. There are large black soil-lick areas on the riverbeds of Kanamakra. This is the favourite spot for elephants and ungulates.

In summer months Kanamakra is cut off for at least five months and reaching here

becomes difficult. During the winter months Kanamakra River becomes a haven for aquatic lives.

Kanamakra - Umling - Gelephu

We head towards Umling via an abandoned sugarcane plantation. The plantation was stopped because this region was inhabited by wild elephants.

If you are in hurry, you can drive 29km to Umling and then another 12km to Gelephu. Do not do this in summer because Mao Khola River stands powerful.

