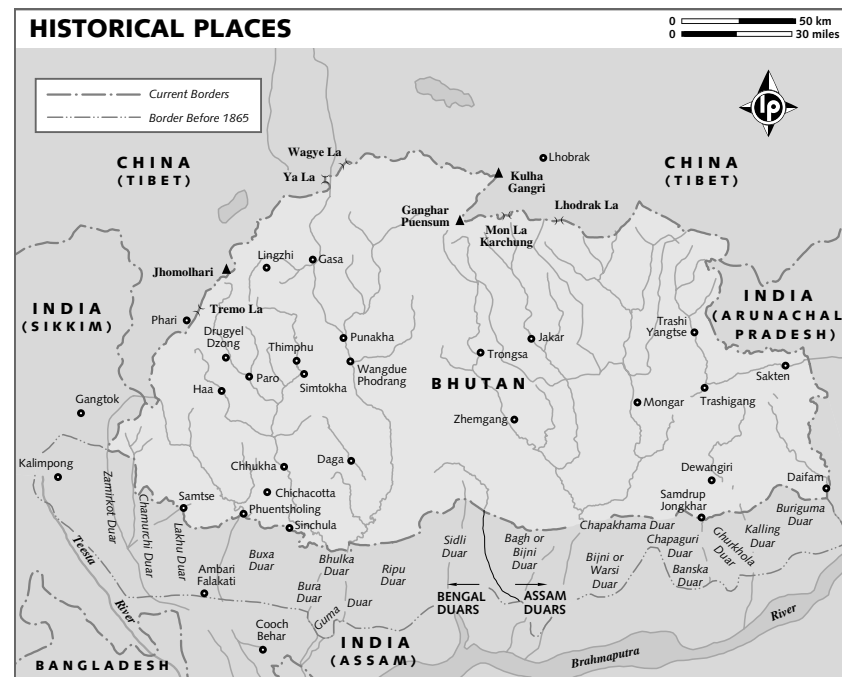


History

Bhutan's early history is steeped in Buddhist folklore and mythology; it features tremendous deeds and beings with supernatural powers. It's said that a saint who had the ability to appear in eight different forms, one of them being Guru Rinpoche, visited Bhutan on a flying tiger and left the imprint of his body and his hat on rocks. School texts describe demons that threatened villages and destroyed temples until captured through magic and converted to Buddhism. Tales abound of ghosts who destroyed temples, and angels who rebuilt them.

Researchers have attached dates to many events, though these often do not seem to fit together into a credible and accurate chronology. When reading Bhutanese history, it's easier to let your imagination flow. Try visualising the spirit of the happenings rather than rationalising events as historical truth. This will, in part, help prepare you for a visit to Bhutan, where spirits, ghosts, yetis, medicine men, and lamas reincarnated in three different bodies are accepted as a part of daily life.

Bhutan's medieval and modern history is better documented than its ancient history, but is no less exotic. This is a time of warlords, feuds, giant fortresses and castles, with intrigue, treachery, fierce battles and extraordinary pageantry



TIMELINE 6th Century

The animist Bon religion is established in several valleys of what is now Bhutan

7th Century

The first Buddhist temples are in Bhutan, such as Kyichu Lhakhang (AD 659), near Paro

all playing feature roles. The country's recent history begins with a hereditary monarchy that was founded in the 20th century and continued the country's policy of isolationism. It was not until the leadership of the third king that Bhutan emerged from its medieval heritage of serfdom and seclusion. Until the 1960s the country had no national currency, no telephones, no schools, no hospitals, no postal service and certainly no tourists. Development efforts have now produced all these – plus a national assembly, airport, roads and a national system of health care. Despite the speed of modernisation, Bhutan has maintained a policy of careful, controlled growth in an effort to preserve its national identity. The government has cautiously accepted tourism, TV and the internet and is set to embark on perhaps its biggest challenge – democracy.

EARLY HISTORY

Many of the important events in the country's early history involved saints and religious leaders and were therefore chronicled only in scriptures. Most of these original documents were destroyed in fires in the printing works of Sonagatsel in 1828 and in Punakha Dzong in 1832. Much of what was left in the old capital of Punakha was lost in an earthquake in 1897 and more records were lost when Paro Dzong burned in 1907. Therefore much of the early history of Bhutan relies on reports from British explorers, on legend and folklore, and the few manuscripts that escaped these disasters.

Archaeological evidence suggests Bhutan was inhabited as early as 1500–2000 BC by nomadic herders who lived in low-lying valleys in winter and moved their animals to high pastures in summer. Many Bhutanese still live this way today. The valleys of Bhutan provided relatively easy access across the Himalaya, and it is believed that the Manas River valley was used as a migration route from India to Tibet.

Some of the early inhabitants of Bhutan were followers of Bon (known as Ben cho in Bhutan), the animistic tradition that was the main religion throughout the Himalayan region before the advent of Buddhism. It is believed that the Bon religion was introduced in Bhutan in the 6th century AD.

Buddhism was probably first introduced to parts of Bhutan as early as the 2nd century, although most historians agree that the first Buddhist temples were built in the 7th century AD. See the boxed text, p129, for the story of the construction of these temples.

The kingdom of Cooch Behar, in what is now West Bengal, influenced Bhutan from the early days. The rulers of Cooch Behar established themselves in Bhutan, but their influence faded in the 7th century AD as the influence of Tibet grew along with the introduction of Buddhism.

VISITS OF GURU RINPOCHE

In AD 746 Sendha Gyab (also known as Sindhu Raja), the king of Bumthang, became possessed by a demon, and it required a powerful tantric master to exorcise it. He sent for the great teacher Padmasambhava, better known as Guru Rinpoche (Precious Master). The Guru captured the demon and converted it to Buddhism. For good measure, he also converted the king and his rival, restoring the country to peace. For a complete description of Guru Rinpoche's efforts, see the boxed text, p173.

The Guru returned to Bhutan via Singye Dzong in Lhuentse and visited the districts of Bumthang, Mongar and Lhuentse. He was returning from

Tibet where, at the invitation of Trisong Detsen, he had introduced Nyingma Buddhism and overcame the demons that were obstructing the construction of Samye Monastery. At Gom Kora, in eastern Bhutan, he left a body print and an impression of his head with a hat. He flew in the form of Dorji Drakpo (one of his eight manifestations) to Taktshang in Paro on a flaming tigress, giving the famous Taktshang monastery the name 'Tiger's Nest' (see Taktshang Goemba, p128).

It is believed that Guru Rinpoche also made a third visit to Bhutan during the reign of Muthri Tsenpo (764–817), the son of Trisong Detsen.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The grandson of Trisong Detsen, Langdharma, ruled Tibet from AD 836 to 842. He banned Buddhism, destroyed religious institutions and banished his brother, Prince Tsangma, to Bhutan. It is believed that many monks fled from Tibet and took refuge in Bhutan during this period. Despite the assassination of Langdharma and the re-introduction of Buddhism, Tibet remained in political turmoil and many Tibetans migrated to western Bhutan.

Between the 9th and 17th centuries numerous ruling clans and noble families emerged in different valleys throughout Bhutan. The various local chieftains spent their energy quarrelling among themselves and with Tibet, and no important nationally recognised political figure emerged during this period.

THE BHUTANESE FORM OF BUDDHISM

Back in Tibet, Lama Tsangpa Gyarey Yeshe Dorji (AD 1161–1211) founded a monastery in the town of Ralung, just east of Gyantse, in AD 1180. He named the monastery Druk (Dragon), after the thunder dragons that he heard in the sky as he searched for an appropriate site upon which to build a monastery. The lineage followed here was named after the monastery and became known as Drukpa Kagyu.

In the 11th and 12th centuries there was a further large influx of Tibetans into Bhutan. Many Drukpa lamas left Tibet because of persecution at the hands of the followers of the rival Gelug lineage. Most of these lamas settled in western Bhutan and established branches of Drukpa monastic orders. Western Bhutan became loosely united through the weight of their teachings. Charismatic lamas emerged as de facto leaders of large portions of the west, while the isolated valleys of eastern and central Bhutan remained separate feudal states.

One of the most important of these lamas was Gyalwa Lhanangpa, who founded the Lhapa Kagyu lineage. He established the Tango Goemba (monastery; p115) on a hill above the northern end of the Thimphu valley and established a system of forts in Bhutan similar to the dzongs found in Tibet.

Lama Phajo Drukgom Shigpo (1184–1251), a disciple of Lama Tsangpa Gyarey, came to Bhutan from Ralung and defeated Lama Lhanangpa. He and his companions established the small Dho-Ngen Dzong on the west bank of the Wang Chhu and took control of the Tango Goemba. Lama Phajo is credited with establishing the Bhutanese form of Buddhism by converting many people to the Drukpa Kagyu school (see p70). Other lamas resented his presence and success, and they tried to kill him through magic spells. Phajo turned the spells back on the lamas, destroying several of their monasteries.

Between the 13th and 16th centuries, the Drukpa Kagyu lineage flourished and Bhutan adopted a separate religious identity. More lamas from Ralung

The most authoritative and complete history of Bhutan in English is Michael Aris' *Bhutan, the Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*.

www.ctf.gov.bt is the Cultural Trust Fund website and is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Bhutan's rich cultural heritage.

GURU RINPOCHE

Guru Rinpoche is also known by the names Padmasambhava, Precious Master and Ugyen Rinpoche. *Padma* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'lotus flower' and is the origin of the Tibetan and Bhutanese name Pema; *sambhava* means 'born from'. He is a historical figure of the 8th century and his birth was predicted by Sakyamuni, the Historical Buddha. He is regarded as the second Buddha and had miraculous powers, including the ability to subdue demons and evil spirits.

Guru Rinpoche is credited with many magical deeds and is regarded as the founder of Nyingma Buddhism. He is one of the most important of Bhutan's religious figures and his visit to Bumthang is recognised as the true introduction of Buddhism to Bhutan. He left an impression of his body on the rock upon which he meditated near the head of the Chokhor valley in Bumthang. On this site the temple of Kurjey Lhakhang was built, and Guru Rinpoche's body print can still be seen there. His statue appears in almost all temples built after his visit to Bhutan in AD 746.

His birthplace was Uddiyana in the Swat valley of what is now Pakistan. Uddiyana is known in Dzongkha as Ugyen, and some texts refer to him as Ugyen Rinpoche. He travelled in various manifestations throughout Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, meditating in numerous caves, which are regarded as important 'power places'. He preserved his teachings and wisdom by concealing them in the form of *terma* (hidden treasures) to be found by enlightened treasure discoverers called *tertons*. His biographer, Yeshe Chhogyel, urges us not to regard Guru Rinpoche as a normal human being, because by doing so we will fail to perceive even a fraction of his enlightened qualities.

Bhutanese and Tibetans differ over a few aspects of his life; the following description reflects the Bhutanese tradition.

Eight Manifestations

The Guru is depicted in eight forms (Guru Tshengay). These are not really different incarnations, but representations of his eight main initiations, in which he assumed a new personality that was symbolised by a new name and appearance. Because initiation is equivalent to entering a new life, it is a form of rebirth. The eight forms follow the chronology of Guru Rinpoche's life.

He emerged as an eight-year-old from a blue lotus on Lake Danakosha in Uddiyana, and was adopted by King Indrabodhi. Then he was called Tshokye Dorji (diamond thunderbolt born from a lake). He later renounced his kingdom and went to receive teachings and ordination from the master Prabhahasti in the cave of Maratrika (near the village of Harishe in eastern Nepal), becoming Sakya Senge (lion of the Sakya clan). In this form he is identified with Sakyamuni, the Historical Buddha.

After studying the teachings of the Vajrayana and mastering the sciences of all Indian *pandits*, he obtained full realisation and was able to see all the gods and deities. Then he was called Loden

were invited to Bhutan to teach and build monasteries and many Bhutanese nobles are descended from Lama Phajo.

Among the visitors to Bhutan during this period was Lama Ngawang Chhogyel (1465–1540). He made several trips and was often accompanied by his sons, who established several goembas. They are credited with building the temple of Druk Choeding in Paro and Pangri Zampa and Hongtsho goembas near Thimphu. Another visitor was Lama Drukpa Kunley, the 'divine madman', who established Chime Lhakhang near Punakha (see p136).

Between the 11th and 16th centuries numerous *terma* (sacred texts) hidden by Guru Rinpoche in caves, rocks and lakes were discovered, as he had prophesied, by tantric lamas called *tertons*. The *tertons* were important

Chogsey (possessor of supreme knowledge). He took as his consort Mandarava, the daughter of the king of Zahor (in the Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh, India). This enraged the king, who condemned them both to be burned, but through his powers the Guru turned the pyre into a lake and converted the kingdom to Buddhism. Then he was called Pema Jugney (Padmasambhava).

He returned to Uddiyana to convert it to Buddhism, but was recognised as the prince who had renounced his kingdom and was burned, along with his consort. He was not consumed by the fire and appeared sitting upon a lotus in a lake. This lake is Rewalsar, also called Tsho Pema (the lotus lake), in Himachal Pradesh, and is an important pilgrimage spot. His father, King Indrabodhi, offered him the kingdom and he became Padma Gyalpo (the lotus king), remaining for 13 years and establishing Buddhism.

When he was preaching in the eight cremation grounds to the *khandromas* (female celestial beings), he caught the life force of the evil deities and he turned them into protectors of Buddhism. Then he was called Nyima Yeozer (sunbeam of enlightenment). Later, 500 heretic masters tried to destroy the doctrine of Buddha, but he vanquished them through the power of his words and brought down a thunderbolt destroying the non-Buddhists in a flash of hail and lightning. He was then called Sengye Dradrok (roaring lion).

When he came to Bhutan the second time and visited Singye Dzong in Kurtoe and Taktshang in Paro, he was in the form of Dorji Drakpo (fierce thunderbolt). He subdued all the evil spirits hindering Buddhism and blessed them as guardians of the doctrine. In this form, Guru Rinpoche rides a tigress.

Statues of Guru Rinpoche

Most statues of Guru Rinpoche are in his manifestation as Padmasambhava, wearing royal robes and holding the insignia of spiritual realisation. His hat is known as the 'lotus cap' and is adorned with a crescent moon, the sun and a small flame-like protuberance that signifies the union of lunar and solar forces. The hat is surmounted by a *dorji* (thunderbolt) and also an eagle's feather, which represents the Guru's soaring mind, penetrating the highest realms of reality.

Often the statues of Padmasambhava are flanked by statues of two female devotees. These are the Indian princess Mandarava, the lady of wisdom, and the Tibetan khandroma Yeshe Chhogyel, who is regarded as an incarnation of Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge. She was gifted with such a perfect memory that she was able to remember the Guru's every word and became his sole biographer. She is depicted as a white, heavenly being with traditional ornaments and flying scarves; Mandarava is usually depicted as an Indian hill princess.

Guru Rinpoche's celestial abode or paradise is a copper-coloured mountain named Zangto Pelri. The guardians of the four directions guard the four gates, and in the centre is a three-roofed pagoda, with Guru Rinpoche enthroned on the ground level, flanked by his two consorts.

religious figures; the best known of these was Pema Lingpa, who recovered his first *terma* from the lake of Membartsho near Bumthang in 1475. Pema Lingpa constructed several monasteries in Bumthang and is one of the most important figures in Bhutanese history (see p175).

RISE OF THE ZHABDRUNG

By the 16th century the political arena was still fragmented between many local chiefs, each controlling his own territory and engaging in petty feuds with the others. There were numerous monasteries competing for superiority and the lamas of western Bhutan were working to extend their influence to the east of the country.

The Divine Madman by Keith Dowman is a wonderful translation of the poems and works of the extraordinary Lama Drukpa Kunley.

1180

Foundation of Druk Monastery in Ralung (Tibet) and beginning of Drukpa Kagyu school

12th Century

Gyalwa Lhanangpa establishes Tango Goemba in Thimphu valley

1184–1251

Lifespan of Lama Phajo Drukgom Shigpo, who establishes Drukpa Kagyu as the dominant school of Buddhism in Bhutan

1433

Thangtong Gyalpo, the Iron Bridge Lama, visits Bhutan from Tibet in search of iron ore and builds eight bridges

Everything changed in 1616 when Ngawang Namgyal (1594–1651) came to Bhutan from Ralung, the original home of the Drukpa Kagyu in Tibet. In his early years he studied religion and art and is said to have been a skilled painter. He was a descendent of Tsangpa Gyarey, the founder of Ralung. At age 12 he was recognised as the reincarnation of Pema Karpo, the prince-abbot of Ralung Monastery (see p71). This recognition was challenged by the ruler of another principality in Tibet, and Ngawang Namgyal found his position at Ralung very difficult. When he was 23, the protective deity Yeshe Goenpo (Mahakala) appeared to him in the form of a raven and directed him south to Bhutan. He travelled through Laya and Gasa and spent time at Pangri Zampa (Thimphu), which was established by his great-great-grandfather, Ngawang Chhogyel.

As Ngawang Namgyal travelled throughout western Bhutan teaching, his political strength increased. Soon he established himself as the religious ruler of Bhutan with the title Zhabdrung Rinpoche (precious jewel at whose feet one prostrates), thus becoming the first in the line of *zhabdrungs*. He built the first of the present system of dzongs at Simtokha, just south of present-day Thimphu. While the primary function of earlier Bhutanese dzongs was to serve as invincible fortresses, the Simtokha Dzong also housed a monastic body and administrative facilities, as well as fulfilling its defensive function. This combination of civil, religious and defensive functions became the model for all of Bhutan's later dzongs.

The Zhabdrung's rule was opposed by the leaders of rival Buddhist lineages within Bhutan. They formed a coalition of five lamas under the leadership of Lama Palden and attacked Simtokha Dzong in 1629. This attack was repelled, but the coalition then aligned itself with a group of Tibetans and continued its opposition. The Zhabdrung's militia defeated the Tibetans on several occasions, and the influence of the rival lineages diminished. Finally, after forging an alliance with the brother of King Singye Namgyal of Ladakh, the Zhabdrung's forces defeated the Tibetans and their coalition ally. In 1639 an agreement was reached with the Tsang Desi in Tibet recognising Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal as the supreme authority in Bhutan.

The Zhabdrung further enhanced his power by establishing relations with neighbouring kings, including Rama Shah, the king of Nepal, and Raja Padmanarayan of Cooch Behar. It was at this time that the king of Ladakh granted the Zhabdrung a number of sites in western Tibet for the purpose of meditation and worship. These included Diraphuk, Nyanri and Zuthulphuk on the slopes of the holy Mt Kailash. The Bhutanese administration of these monasteries continued until the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959. Other Tibetan monasteries that came under Bhutanese administration were Rimpung, Doba, Khochag, and De Dzong, all near Gartok. A Bhutanese lama was sent as representative to Nepal, and Bhutanese monasteries were established at Bodhnath (Chorten Jaro Khasho) and Swayambhunath in Kathmandu. Bhutan administered Swayambhunath until after the Nepal–Tibet war of 1854–56, when it was retaken by Nepal on the suspicion that Bhutan had helped the Tibetans.

During his reign, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal ordered the construction of many monasteries and dzongs throughout Bhutan. Of these, the dzongs at Simtokha, Paro, Wandue Phodrang, Punakha and Trongsa are still standing. He established the first sangha (community of monks) at Cheri Goemba near Thimphu. When Punakha Dzong was completed in 1635, the sangha was

moved there and became the *dratshang* (central monk body), headed by a supreme abbot called the Je Khenpo.

INVASIONS FROM TIBET

In the meantime, strife continued in Tibet, between the Nyingma (known as 'red hat') group of Buddhists and the Geluggpas ('yellow hat'); the latter are headed by the Dalai Lama. The Mongol chief Gushri Khan, a patron of the Dalai Lama, led his army in an attack on Tibet's Tsang province, where he overthrew the Rinpoche dynasty and established the supremacy of the Geluggpas in the region.

In 1644 the Mongols and Tibetans, who were used to the extremely high plains of Tibet, launched an assault from Lhobrak into Bumthang, but found themselves overpowered by the forests and heat of Bhutan. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal personally led the successful resistance and several Tibetan officers and a large number of horses were captured. Much of the armour and many weapons that were taken during this battle are on display in Punakha Dzong. Drukgyel Dzong was built at the head of Paro valley in 1647 to commemorate the victory and to prevent any further Tibetan infiltration.

One of the strongest of Tibet's Dalai Lamas was the 'Great Fifth'. During his administration, he became jealous of the growing influence of the rival Drukpas on his southern border and mounted further invasions into Bhutan in 1648 and 1649. Each attempt was launched via Phari in Tibet, from where the Great Fifth's forces crossed the 5000m-high Tremo La into Paro valley. They were repelled, and again the Bhutanese captured large amounts of armour, weapons and other spoils. Some of this booty may still be seen in the National Museum in Paro. Legend relates that the Zhabdrung built a *thos*, a heap of stones representing the kings, or guardians of the four directions, to subdue the Tibetan army. You may not find this one, but similar *thos* can still be seen in the courtyards of many of Bhutan's goembas.

Ngawang Namgyal's success in repelling the Tibetan attacks further consolidated his position as ruler. The large militia that he raised for the purpose also gave him effective control of the country. Mingyur Tenpa, who was appointed by the Zhabdrung as *penlop* (governor) of Trongsa, undertook a campaign to unite all the valleys of the central and eastern parts of the country under the Zhabdrung's rule, which he accomplished by about 1655. At this time the great dzongs of Jakar, Lhuentse, Trashigang, Shongar (now Mongar), Trashigang and Zhemgang were constructed.

A BHUTANESE IDENTITY EMERGES

The Zhabdrung realised that Bhutan needed to differentiate itself from Tibet in order to preserve its religion and cultural identity. He devised many of Bhutan's customs, traditions and ceremonies in a deliberate effort to develop a unique cultural identity for the country.

As a revered Buddhist scholar, he had both the astuteness and authority to codify the Kagyu religious teachings into a system that was distinctively Bhutanese. He also defined the national dress and instituted the tsechu festival.

The Zhabdrung created a code of laws that defined the relationship between the lay people and the monastic community. A system of taxes was developed; these were paid in kind in the form of wheat, buckwheat, rice, yak meat, butter, paper, timber and clothing. The people were subject to a system of compulsory labour for the construction of trails, dzongs, temples

Although known as Bhutan to the outside world, the country has been known as Druk Yul, 'land of the thunder dragon', to its inhabitants since the 13th century.

www.bhutan.gov.bt is the government of Bhutan's portal and has links to the draft constitution, Gross National Happiness (GNH) and background to government operations and policy.

1450–1521

The much-heralded life of Pema Lingpa, the most important *terton* (discoverer of sacred texts and artefacts) in Bhutan

1455–1529

Lifespan of Lama Drukpa Kunley, who travelled throughout Bhutan preaching an unconventional approach to Buddhism and life

1616

The first zhabdrung, Ngawang Namgyal, arrives in Bhutan from Ralung, Tibet

1627

Portuguese Jesuits, Fathers Casella and Cabral are the first European visitors to Bhutan

and bridges. These practices lasted almost unchanged until the third king eliminated them in 1956.

In the 1640s the Zhabdrung created the system of Choesi, the separation of the administration of the country into two offices. The religious and spiritual aspects of the country were handled by the Zhabdrung. The political, administrative and foreign-affairs aspects of the government were to be handled by the *desi* (secular ruler), who was elected to the post. The office of the Zhabdrung theoretically had greater power, including the authority to sign documents relating to an important matter within the government. Under the system at that time, the Zhabdrung was the spiritual ruler and the Je Khenpo was the chief abbot and official head of the monastic establishment. The Je Khenpo had a status equal to the *desi* and sometimes held that office.

The first *desi* was Tenzin Drugzey (1591–1656), one of the monks who came with Ngawang Namgyal from Ralung Monastery. He established a system of administration throughout the country, formalising the position of *penlop* as that of provincial governor. There were initially three districts: Trongsa in the centre, Paro in the west and Dagana in the south. The *penlops* became the representatives of the central government, which was then in Punakha. There were three officers called *dzongpens* (lords of the dzong) who looked after the affairs of the subdistricts of Punakha, Thimphu and Wangdue Phodrang.

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal went into retreat in Punakha Dzong in 1651. He didn't emerge again, and although it is likely that he passed away very early in the period of retreat, his death remained concealed until 1705. It is believed that the four successive *desis* who ruled during this period felt that the continued presence of the Zhabdrung was necessary to keep the country unified and Tibet at bay. Nonetheless, Tibet mounted seven attacks on Bhutan between 1656 and 1730.

In 1668 Mingyur Tenpa was enthroned as the third *desi*. He ruled for 12 years, during which time he extended the boundaries of Bhutan westwards to Kalimpong, which is now part of India.

CIVIL WARS

When the Je Khenpo finally announced the death of the Zhabdrung in 1705, he said that three rays of light emanated from the Zhabdrung's body, representing the *ku sung thug* (body, speech and mind) of Ngawang Namgyal. This indicated that the Zhabdrung would be reincarnated in these three forms, though only the reincarnation of the Zhabdrung's mind was considered to be the head of state. Because the position of *zhabdrung* was a continuing one, it was necessary for the mind incarnation to be reborn after the death of the previous incarnation.

This structure resulted in long periods when the *zhabdrung* was too young to rule and the *desi* often became the de facto ruler. Because the *desi* was an elected position, there was considerable rivalry among various factions for the office. These factions also took advantage of uncertainty over which of the three incarnations of the Zhabdrung was the 'true' incarnation. None of the successive incarnations had the personal charisma or political astuteness of Ngawang Namgyal.

The next 200 years were a time of civil war, internal conflicts and political infighting. While there were only six mind incarnations of the Zhabdrung during this period, there were 55 *desis*. The longest-serving *desi* was the 13th incumbent, Sherab Wangchuk, who ruled for 20 years; and the most

important was the fourth, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye, who ruled from 1680 to 1694. Few of the rulers finished their term; 22 *desis* were assassinated or deposed by rivals.

The political situation became so unstable that some of the rival factions appealed to the Tibetans for assistance. In 1729 and 1730 Tibet took advantage of Bhutan's instability and invaded the country three times. The lamas in Tibet initiated a truce that eventually ended the hostilities. The rival Bhutanese factions submitted their case to the Chinese emperor in Beijing for mediation. But the issue was only finally resolved when several of the Bhutanese protagonists died, leaving the currently recognised mind incarnation of the Zhabdrung as the ruler. At the same time, formal diplomatic relations were established between Bhutan and Tibet, which the late historian Michael Aris said 'helped to guarantee the fact of Bhutanese independence'.

RELATIONS WITH COOCH BEHAR

In 1730 the 10th *desi* assisted Gya Chila, the ruler of Cooch Behar, to defeat invaders and to settle a family feud; Bhutan was then allowed to station a force in that southern kingdom. In 1768 the *desi* tried to suppress the influence of the religious establishment in Bhutan and to strengthen his own influence outside of the country. He established alliances with the Panchen Lama in Tibet and with King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Nepal. In 1772 the Bhutanese invaded Cooch Behar to help settle a feud over succession. They won, and kidnapped the crown prince and the queen of Cooch Behar. The Bhutanese also captured Raja Dhairjendra Narayan, the king of Cooch Behar, in the same year.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE BRITISH

In his book, *Lands of the Thunderbolt*, the Earl of Ronaldshay wrote:

...it was not until 1772 that the East India Company became conscious of the existence, across its northern frontier, of a meddlesome neighbour.

The first contact the British had with Bhutan was when the claimants to the throne of Cooch Behar appealed to the East India Company to help drive the Bhutanese out of their kingdom.

Because the East India Company was a strictly commercial enterprise, its officers agreed to help when the deposed ruler of Cooch Behar offered to pay half of the revenues of the state in return for assistance. In December 1772 the British governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, sent Indian troops and guns to Cooch Behar and, despite suffering heavy losses, routed the Bhutanese and restored the king to the throne. However, Cooch Behar paid a very high price for this assistance. Not only did its rulers pay Rs50,000, but in 1773 they also signed a treaty ceding substantial powers and future revenue to the East India Company.

The British pushed the Bhutanese back into the hills and followed them into Bhutan. The British won another major battle in January 1773 at the garrison of Chichacotta (now Khithokha) in the hills east of what is now Phuentsholing. A second battle was fought near Kalimpong in April 1773. The Bhutanese troops were personally led by the 16th *desi* but, after the second defeat, he was deposed by a coup d'état.

A Political and Religious History of Bhutan by CT Dorji chronicles the major personalities in the religious and political spheres Bhutan's history.

Several records of the early European exploration and missions to Bhutan have been reprinted by Indian publishers and are readily available in bookshops in Thimphu, Delhi and Kathmandu.

The 1774 East India Company expedition led by George Bogle planted potatoes wherever they went, providing a new food crop for Bhutan and a lasting legacy of this mission.

1639

Tibet recognises Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal as the supreme authority in Bhutan

1705

The much-delayed announcement of the demise of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

1772

Bhutan invades Cooch Behar and kidnaps its king. The British East India company agrees to assist Cooch Behar in return for payment

1774

George Bogle leads a trade mission to Bhutan and Tibet, and plants potatoes in Bhutanese soil

THE 1897 EARTHQUAKE

One of the most devastating natural disasters in Bhutan was the great Assam earthquake that occurred at 5.06pm on 12 June 1897. The epicentre was about 80km south of Bhutan in Assam and had an estimated magnitude of 8.7 on the Richter scale. The earthquake destroyed the dzongs in Punakha and Lingzhi and severely damaged the dzongs of Wangdue Phodrang, Trongsa, Jakar and the *utse* (central tower) of Trashig Chhoe. Paro Dzong escaped largely unharmed.

FIRST TREATY WITH THE BRITISH

The new *desi* wanted to make an agreement with the British and appealed to the Panchen Lama in Tibet for assistance. The Panchen Lama then wrote what the British described as ‘a very friendly and intelligent letter’ that was carried to Calcutta (now called Kolkata) by an Indian pilgrim. The British, although more eager to establish relations with Tibet than to solve the issue of Bhutan, agreed to comply with the Tibetan request. The result was a peace treaty between Bhutan and the British signed in Calcutta on 25 April 1774. In this treaty the *desi* agreed to respect the territory of the East India Company and to allow the company to cut timber in the forests of Bhutan. The British returned all the territory they had captured.

The East India Company wasted no time in sending a trade mission to Tibet. In May 1774 George Bogle led a party through Bhutan to Tibet. The group spent a few weeks in Thimphu waiting for permission to go to Tibet, and eventually reached the seat of the Panchen Lama in Tashilhunpo in October. The written account of this mission provides the first Western view into the isolated kingdom of Bhutan (for more information, see p36).

The British in India attached their own names, derived from Sanskrit, to the titles used by the Bhutanese. They called the *zhabdrung* the ‘*dharma raja*’, and the *desi* ‘*deb raja*’. *Raja* is Sanskrit for ‘king’; therefore the *dharma raja* was the king who ruled by religious law and the *deb raja* was the king who delivered wellbeing or material gifts. *Deb* is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *deva* or *devata* (the giver).

In the next few years two small expeditions travelled to Bhutan. Dr Alexander Hamilton led a group to Punakha and Thimphu in 1776, and another in 1777, to discuss Bhutanese claims to Ambari Falakati and to consolidate transit rights through Bhutan to Tibet that had been negotiated by Bogle’s mission.

THE PROBLEM OF THE DUARS

The political intrigue and civil wars continued in Bhutan, and there were numerous skirmishes over boundaries and trading rights. The British were engaged in the Burmese war of 1825–26. As a result of this war, the British gained control of Assam, the territory that forms the eastern half of Bhutan’s southern border.

The area of plains between the Brahmaputra River up to and including the lowest of the hills of Bhutan was known as the *duars*, which means doors or gates (see p84). The western part of this area, known as the Bengal Duars, had been annexed by the third *desi*, Mingyur Tenpa, in the late 17th century and the Bhutanese considered it their territory. The eastern part, the Assam Duars, had long been administered in a complex rental agreement between Bhutan and Assam.

After the Burmese war, the British took over the peculiar land rental arrangement for the Assam Duars, along with what were described as ‘very unsatisfactory relations of the Assamese with the Bhutanese’. Major disagreements between Britain and Bhutan resulted. In 1826 the British and Bhutanese came into conflict over the ownership of the *duars*. Other than the area’s strategic importance, the British were attracted to the *duars* because they were excellent tea-growing country. However, they were also a malarial jungle, and the British had a very difficult time keeping their troops healthy.

Bhutan’s existing agreement with the Assamese allowed the British to occupy the region from July to November, and the Bhutanese to occupy it the remainder of the year in return for payment in horses, gold, knives, blankets, musk and other articles. The new arrangement meant that Bhutan sent the payment to the British, who accused the Bhutanese of delivering piebald horses and other defective goods. The Bhutanese insisted that middlemen working for the British had substituted inferior goods.

Disagreements over payments and administration escalated. In 1836 the British mounted an attack on Dewangiri (now Deothang), in the east, to force the surrender of fugitives who had committed crimes in British territory. The *dzongpen* refused to comply and attacked the British detachment. The British won that battle and annexed Dewangiri and the entire Baska Duar. The following year, however, at the request of the *desi*, they agreed to return control of the *duar* to the Bhutanese.

The British annexed the two easternmost *duars* in 1840 and the rest of the Assam Duars in September 1841, agreeing to pay Bhutan an annual compensation of Rs10,000. Lord Auckland wrote to the *deb* and *dharma rajas* that the British were:

...compelled by an imperative sense of duty to occupy the whole of the duars without any reference to your Highnesses’ wishes, as I feel assured that it is the only course which is likely to hold out a prospect of restoring peace and prosperity to that tract of country.

Perhaps more revealing is a letter from Colonel Jenkins, the governor-general’s agent, outlining the need for taking over the Assam Duars. He wrote:

Had we possession of the Dooars, the Bhootan Government would necessarily in a short time become entirely dependent upon us, as holding in our hands the source of all their subsistence.

This was the time of the Afghan War and the Anglo–Sikh wars. The British Indian administration had little time to worry about Bhutan, and major and minor conflicts and cross-border incursions continued. Although the British were making plans to annex the Bengal Duars, they were not able to follow through. Their troops were kept busy trying to suppress the Indian uprising of 1857, which was a movement against British rule in India.

Bhutan took advantage of the instability in the region and mounted numerous raids in the Bengal Duars. To compensate for their losses, the British deducted large sums from payments they owed the Bhutanese. In 1861 the Bhutanese retaliated by raiding Cooch Behar, capturing a number of elephants and kidnapping several residents, including some British subjects.

Bhutan and the British by Peter Collister is a comprehensive account of the interaction between Britain and Bhutan from 1771 to 1987.

1783

Captain Samuel Turner leads a grand British Raj expedition to Bhutan and Tibet

1826

Bhutan and Britain start bickering over the sovereignty of the duars (lowest Bhutanese hills)

1864

The ill-fated Ashley Eden expedition sours relations between Bhutan and Britain

1865

Bhutan and Britain go to war over the duars, which was finally resolved with a treaty that saw Bhutan’s territory greatly reduced

Lands of the Thunderbolt, Sikhim, Chumbi & Bhutan by the Earl of Ronaldshay is a very readable, very British account of regional history and an expedition to Bhutan in the early 20th century.

THE TRONGSA PENLOP GAINS CONTROL

At this time the incumbent *zhabdrung* was a youth of 18, and the affairs of state were handled by the Lhengyal Shungtshog (Council of Ministers), which consisted of the Trongsa and Paro penlops, several *dzongpens* and other officials. There was constant infighting and intrigue between the Paro and Trongsa *penlops*, both of whom were vying for power through attacks, conspiracy and kidnapping. When one gained control, he appointed a *desi* and enthroned him; soon the other penlop gained control, ejected the opposing *desi* and placed his own representative on the throne.

Through a series of shrewd alliances the Trongsa penlop, Jigme Namgyal (1825–82), gained the upper hand and established effective control of the country. This was the first time peace had prevailed since the time of the first *zhabdrung*. Jigme Namgyal was working to strengthen his power and that of the central government when he had an inconvenient visitor.

THE HUMILIATION OF ASHLEY EDEN

The British had managed to extend their influence into Sikkim, making it a British protectorate, and subsequently decided to send a mission to

Views of Medieval Bhutan is a coffee-table book by Michael Aris that presents the diary and drawings of Samuel Davis, an artist and member of George Bogle's 1774 expedition to Bhutan.

EXPLORATION OF WESTERN TRAVELLERS

Some of the most interesting stories of Bhutan, and much of Bhutan's recorded history, came from the descriptions provided by early European explorers. These records provide an insight into what they observed and also reveal the extraordinary attitudes of some of the envoys Britain sent to negotiate with Bhutan.

Fathers Cacella & Cabral

The first Western visitors to Bhutan were two Portuguese Jesuit priests. In early 1627 Fathers Cacella and Cabral travelled from Calcutta to Bhutan en route to Shigatse in Tibet. They stayed for a few months in Cheri Goemba, north of Thimphu, with the *Zhabdrung*. There is no complete account of their journey, but one of their letters provides an insight into Ngawang Namgyal's character:

'He received us with a demonstration of great benevolence, signifying this in the joy which he showed on seeing us and on knowing where we had come from, where we were from, that is from what country or nation, and he asked the other questions normal at a first meeting.'

George Bogle

Some 150 years later, the first British expedition arrived in Bhutan in 1774, just after the first British treaties with Bhutan and Tibet were signed. The Court of Directors of the East India Company sent a mission to Tibet via Bhutan to find out about goods, 'especially such as are of great value and easy transportation'. The expedition team, led by George Bogle, planted potatoes wherever they went, providing a new food crop for Bhutan and a lasting legacy of this mission. They spent five months in Thimphu and then travelled on to Tibet.

Samuel Turner

The next major venture into Bhutan was in 1783, when Samuel Turner led a grand expedition with all the accoutrements of the British Raj. They travelled through the *duars* in palanquins and

Bhutan to establish a resident British representative and encourage better communication.

Despite reports of political chaos in Bhutan, Ashley Eden, the secretary of the government of Bengal, set out from Darjeeling in November 1864 to meet the *desi*, or *deb raja*. Ignoring numerous messages from the Bhutanese that the British mission was not welcome, Eden pushed on past Kalimpong, through Daling, Haa and Paro, reaching Punakha on 15 March.

It's not clear whether it was more by accident or by design, but Eden's party was jeered, pelted with rocks, made to wait long hours in the sun and subjected to other humiliations. Both Bhutanese and British pride suffered badly. As Eden describes it in *Political Missions to Bootan*:

The Penlow [penlop] took up a large piece of wet dough and began rubbing my face with it; he pulled my hair, and slapped me on the back, and generally conducted himself with great insolence.

Eden exacerbated the situation by sending the Lhengyal Shungtshog a copy of a draft treaty with terms that he had been instructed to negotiate. His actions

followed Bogle's route to Thimphu. They also visited Punakha and Wangdue Phodrang before crossing to Tibet.

Ashley Eden

Minor British expeditions to Bhutan were made in 1810, 1812, 1815 and 1837, for the most part in order to settle border disputes and conflict over the *duars*. The Ashley Eden mission of 1863 attempted to resolve these issues. He advocated a punitive policy to teach the Bhutanese that they would not be allowed to 'treat our power with contempt'.

John Claude White

There were no formal expeditions to Bhutan for more than 40 years after Eden's, but the Survey of India sent several agents disguised as lamas and pilgrims to explore Bhutan and Tibet in 1883 and 1886.

By 1905 the Bhutanese and British were friends due to the assistance of the *penlop* of Trongsa, Ugyen Wangchuck, had provided the 1904 Younghusband expedition to Lhasa. White and his large party travelled into Haa and Paro, en route to the investiture ceremony in Punakha, and were guests of Ugyen Wangchuck at his new palace in Bumthang. The expedition returned with the first photographs of *dzongs* and the court of Bhutan.

In 1906 White made a reconnaissance through eastern Bhutan to southern Tibet. He made a third trip, in 1907, when he was invited as the British representative to the coronation of Ugyen Wangchuck as the first king of Bhutan. A summary of White's account appeared in the April 1914 issue of the *National Geographic*, and made Bhutan known to the world for the first time.

Other British Political Officers

Between 1909 and 1947 the British sent numerous political officers to Bhutan and presented the king with decorations. In 1927 Lt Col FM Bailey attended the coronation of the second king and Lt Col JLR Weir travelled to Bumthang in 1931 to present the king with the insignia of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire.

Political Missions to Bootan by Ashley Eden is a pompous Victorian account of the history of Bhutan. After reading a few pages, you'll have some idea as to why Eden was treated so badly when he arrived in Punakha.

1865

After the *duar* war, the saying went that Bhutan's border is where a rock rolled down the hill finally stops

1885

After decades of civil unrest, Ugyen Wangchuck emerges as the most powerful figure in the country

1897

On 12 June, the great Assam earthquake destroys the *dzongs* in Punakha and Lingzhi, and severely damages many others

1907

Ugyen Wangchuck elected the hereditary ruler of Bhutan, the Druk Gyalpo

implied that this was the final version of the treaty that the Bhutanese were to sign without any discussion. The Bhutanese took immediate exception to Eden's high-handedness and soon presented him with an alternative treaty that returned all the *duars* to Bhutan. One clause in the treaty stated:

We have written about that the settlement is permanent; but who knows, perhaps this settlement is made with one word in the mouth and two in the heart. If, therefore, this settlement is false, the Dharma Raja's demons will, after deciding who is true or false, take his life, and take out his liver and scatter it to the winds like ashes.

Reading this, it's little wonder that Eden feared for the safety of his party. He signed the treaty, but under his signature added the English words 'under compulsion', which, naturally, the Bhutanese could not read.

THE DUAR WAR OF 1865 & THE RISE OF UGYEN WANGCHUCK

Although the British considered Eden's mission a failure, and reprimanded him for his conduct, they continued the dispute with Bhutan over payment for the Bengal Duars. The Bhutanese, in turn, were furious the British had renounced the treaty Eden had signed. In November 1864 the British summarily annexed the Bengal Duars, gaining effective control of the entire south of Bhutan. The Trongsa *penlop* mounted a carefully planned counterattack. His troops, protected by shields of rhinoceros hide, captured two British guns and drove the British forces out of Bhutan in January 1865.

The British regrouped and recaptured various towns, including Samtse (then called Chamurchi). A fierce battle at Dewangiri on 2 April essentially ended the war, with the British destroying all the buildings and slaughtering their captives. Negotiations continued through the summer. Eventually the Bhutanese returned the captured guns and accepted a treaty. The treaty of Sinchula was signed, under duress, by the Bhutanese on 11 November 1865. In it the Bhutanese ceded the *duars* to Britain forever and agreed to allow free trade between the two countries.

Through this treaty, Bhutan lost a major tract of valuable farmland and a large portion of its wealth. Its borders became the foot of the hills bordering the plain of India. It is often said that Bhutan's border is where a rock rolled down the hill finally stops. Among the important landmarks the Bhutanese lost were the town of Ambari Falakati, northwest of Cooch Behar, the town of Dewangiri (now called Deothang) in the east and the territory on the east bank of the Teesta River, including what is now the town of Kalimpong.

Back in Bhutan's heartland there were continuing civil wars, but the *penlop* of Trongsa, Jigme Namgyal, retained his power and in 1870 was enthroned as the 51st *desi*. The next 10 years were again a time of intrigue, treachery, power broking and continual strife. The *penlop* of Paro and the *dzongpens* of Punakha and Wangdue Phodrang conspired to challenge the position of *Desi* Jigme Namgyal and his successor, who was his half-brother. After he retired as *desi*, Jigme Namgyal remained in firm control of the country and in 1879 appointed his 17-year-old son, Ugyen Wangchuck, as Paro *penlop*. Michael Aris' book *The Raven Crown* gives a detailed description of this extraordinary period.

After Jigme Namgyal died, his son consolidated his own position following a feud over the post of *penlop* of Trongsa. At the age of 20, Ugyen Wangchuck marched on Bumthang and Trongsa and in 1882 was appointed *penlop* of Trongsa, while still retaining the post of *penlop* of Paro. Because his father had enhanced the powers of the office of the Trongsa *penlop*, this gave him much more influence than the *desi*. When a battle broke out between the *dzongpens* of Punakha and Thimphu, Ugyen Wangchuck tried to mediate the dispute.

He sent in his troops after unsuccessful negotiations and his forces defeated the troops loyal to both *dzongpens* and seized control of Simtokha Dzong. The monk body and the *penlop* of Paro tried to settle the conflict and in 1885 arranged a meeting at the Changlimithang parade ground in Thimphu. During the meeting a fight broke out, the representative of the Thimphu *dzongpen* was killed and the *dzongpen* fled to Tibet. Following the battle, Ugyen Wangchuck emerged as the most powerful person in the country, assumed full authority, installed his own nominee as *desi*, and reduced the post to a ceremonial one.

THE FIRST KING

In order to re-establish Bhutan's sovereignty and help consolidate his position, Ugyen Wangchuck developed closer relations with the British. He accompanied Francis Younghusband during his invasion of Tibet in 1904 and assisted with the negotiations that resulted in a treaty between Tibet and Britain. The British rewarded the *penlop* by granting him the title of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire. In 1906 Sir Ugyen Wangchuck was invited to Calcutta to attend the reception for the Prince of Wales and returned to Bhutan with a better appreciation of the world that lay beyond the country's borders.

In 1907 the secular ruler, the *desi*, died and Ugyen Wangchuck was elected as the hereditary ruler of Bhutan by a unanimous vote of Bhutan's chiefs and principal lamas. He was crowned on 17 December 1907 and installed as head of state with the title Druk Gyalpo (Dragon King). He continued to maintain excellent relations with the British, partly in an effort to gain some security from the increasing Chinese influence in Tibet.

THE TREATY OF PUNAKHA

British-Bhutanese relations were enhanced in the treaty of Punakha, which was signed in 1910. This treaty stated that the British government would 'exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan'. It was agreed that Bhutan would 'be guided by the advice of the British Government in regard to its external relations'. The compensation for the *duars* was doubled to Rs100,000 per year and Bhutan agreed to refer disputes with Cooch Behar and Sikkim to the British for settlement.

Bhutan still refused to allow the appointment of a British resident, and continued to maintain a policy of isolation aimed at preserving its own sovereignty in an era of colonisation. In 1911 King Ugyen Wangchuck attended the great durbar held by King George V at Delhi and was given the additional decoration of Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India.

THE SECOND KING

Ugyen Wangchuck died in 1926 and was succeeded by his 24-year-old son, Jigme Wangchuck. He ruled during the time of the Great Depression and

Michael Aris' book *The Raven Crown* gives a detailed description of Bhutan in the early 20th century; it is lavishly illustrated with rare photographs and provides a perspective based on Bhutanese accounts.

www.bhutanstudies.org .bt is the website for the Centre for Bhutan Studies, a research institute dedicated to promoting research and scholarship on Bhutan; it publishes many detailed historical research articles among other subjects.

1910

The Treaty of Punakha is signed, guaranteeing Bhutan's sovereignty and giving Britain a hand in its external relations

1926

Ugyen Wangchuck dies and is succeeded by his son Jigme Wangchuck, the second Druk Gyalpo

1949

Bhutan signs a treaty with newly independent India and gains a small concession of land in the *duars*

1952

King Jigme Wangchuck is succeeded to the throne by his son Jigme Dorje Wangchuck

Sikhim and Bhutan, Twenty-one Years on the North-east Frontier by J Claude White describes a 1905 expedition to present the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck with the insignia of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire.

Karma Ura's book *The Hero With a Thousand Eyes* gives a wonderful insight into the protocol and workings of the Bhutanese court in the days of the second king, Jigme Wangchuck, and is available in Thimphu.

WWII, but these catastrophic world events did not affect Bhutan because of its barter economy and isolation.

Jigme Wangchuck refined the administrative and taxation systems and brought the entire country under his direct control. He made Wangdichholing Palace in Bumthang his summer palace, and moved the entire court to Kuenga Rabten, south of Trongsa, in the winter.

After India gained independence from Britain on 15 August 1947, the new Indian government recognised Bhutan as an independent country. In 1949 Bhutan signed a treaty with independent India that was very similar to their earlier treaty with the British. The treaty reinforced Bhutan's position as a sovereign state. India agreed not to interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan, while Bhutan agreed to be guided by the government of India in its external relations. The treaty also returned to Bhutan about 82 sq km of the *duars* in the southeast of the country, including Dewangiri, that had been annexed by the British.

THE THIRD KING & THE MODERNISATION OF BHUTAN

King Jigme Wangchuck died in 1952. He was succeeded by his son, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who had been educated in India and England and spoke fluent Tibetan, English and Hindi. To improve relations with India he invited the Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, to visit Bhutan in 1958.

When the Chinese took control of Tibet in 1959, it became obvious that a policy of isolationism was not appropriate in the modern world. The king knew that in order to preserve Bhutan's independence, the country had to become a member of the larger world community. In 1961 Bhutan emerged from centuries of self-imposed isolation and embarked on a process of planned development.

Bhutan joined the Colombo Plan in 1962. This gave it access to technical assistance and training from member countries in Southeast Asia. The first 'five-year plan' for development was implemented in 1961 and India agreed to help finance and construct the large Chhukha hydroelectric project in western Bhutan. Not all Bhutanese approved of the pace of change. There were clashes between rival power groups and the prime minister, Jigme Palden Dorji, who was a leading proponent of change, was assassinated on 5 April 1964.

Bhutan joined the Universal Postal Union in 1969 and became a member of the UN in 1971. In the same year, Bhutan and India established formal diplomatic relations and exchanged ambassadors.

The king's domestic accomplishments were also impressive. In 1953, early in his reign, he established the Tshogdu (National Assembly) and drew up a 12-volume code of law. He abolished serfdom, reorganised land holdings, created the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and police force, and established the High Court. However, as he led Bhutan into the modern world, he emphasised the need to preserve Bhutanese culture and tradition.

The National Assembly

The Tshogdu, or National Assembly, meets twice a year. It has 150 members, all of whom serve three-year terms and fall into three categories. The largest group, with 105 members, consists of the *chimis*, representatives of Bhutan's 20 *dzongkhags* (administrative districts; they are marked on the colour map, pp2–3). Each household has a vote in village elections and the *gups* (village

headmen or headpersons) elect the *chimi*. The *zhung dratshang* (clergy) elect 10 monastic representatives and another 35 representatives are senior civil servants nominated by the government. These appointees include the *dzongdags* (district governors), ministers, secretaries of various government departments and other high-ranking officials.

THE FOURTH KING & THE INTRODUCTION OF DEMOCRACY

King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck died in 1972 at age 44. He was succeeded by his 16-year-old son, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Like his father, he was educated in India and England, but he also received a Bhutanese education at the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro. He pledged to continue his father's program of modernisation and announced a plan for the country to achieve economic self-reliance. This plan took advantage of Bhutan's special circumstances – a small population, abundant land and rich natural resources. Among the development goals set by the king was the ideal of economic self-reliance and what he nicknamed 'gross national happiness' (GNH). GNH is not a simple appraisal of the smiles on the faces of the populace; rather it encompasses explicit criteria to measure development projects and progress in terms of society's greater good. A more sustainable happiness for the individual is believed to derive from such an approach.

The coronation of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck as the fourth Druk Gyalpo on 2 June 1974 was a major turning point in the opening of Bhutan, and was the first time that the international press was allowed to enter the country. A total of 287 invited guests travelled to Thimphu for the event, and several new hotels were built to accommodate them. These hotels later provided the basis for the development of tourism in Bhutan.

The king has emphasised modernisation of education, health services, rural development and communications. He was the architect of Bhutan's policy of environmental conservation, which gives precedence to ecological considerations over commercial interests. He continued the reforms begun by his father in the areas of administration, labour and justice, including the introduction of a secret ballot and the abolishment of compulsory labour. He promotes national identity, traditional values and the concept of 'One Nation, One People'. Bhutan's six development goals, as expressed by the king are: self-reliance; sustainability; efficiency and development of the private sector; people's participation and decentralisation; human-resource development; and regionally balanced development.

In 1988 the royal wedding solemnised the king's marriage to the sisters Ashi Dorji Wangmo, Ashi Tshering Pem, Ashi Tshering Yangdon and Ashi Sangay Choedon.

In 2005 the 49-year-old king announced a plan to abdicate the throne in favour of his eldest son, Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, and help move the country from an absolute monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy in 2008. At the time of research, a draft, 34-point constitution was being circulated around the country by the crown prince seeking opinion and support and is expected to be ratified by referendum. The constitution reinforces the king's idea of having a democratic government committed to increasing GNH and not just gross national product (GNP). Bhutan's well-planned journey to democracy rests on this constitution's acceptance.

The 1897 earthquake which destroyed and damaged many of the dzongs was the first documentation of a quake producing vertical accelerations greater than 1G, which means that large boulders were lifted from their location and moved to a new spot without touching the ground.

1961

Bhutan warily emerges from self-imposed isolation and a process of controlled development, undertaking modernisation

1972

King Jigme Dorje Wangchuck is succeeded to the throne by his son, 16-year-old Jigme Singye Wangchuck

1974

The official coronation of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

1974

The first 'tourist group' explores the country's sights, paving the way for international visitors to come

HISTORY OF TOURISM IN BHUTAN

Until the beginning of King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's modernisation efforts in 1960, most of the non-Indian foreigners who entered Bhutan were British explorers (p36). A few foreigners were permitted into the country during the 1960s, but only the royal family had the authority to issue invitations, so almost all visitors were royal guests.

Early trekkers included Desmond Doig, a friend of the royal family who trekked in 1961 on assignment for *National Geographic*. In 1963 Professor Augusto Gansser travelled throughout the country studying geology, and in 1964 a group of British physicians, Michael Ward, Frederic Jackson and R Turner, mounted an expedition to the remote Lunana region.

The coronation of the fourth king in 1974 was the first time that a large number of foreign visitors had entered the kingdom. After the coronation, small groups of tourists were allowed into the country and given permission to visit the dzongs and goembas in Thimphu and Paro. From these beginnings, the pattern for Bhutan's tourism industry evolved.

The first group of paying tourists arrived in 1974, organised and led by Lars Eric Lindblad, founder of Lindblad Travel in Connecticut, USA, a pioneer of modern-day group tours. Lindblad encouraged the government to limit tourism and to charge high fees.

Paro airport was opened in 1983 and the newly formed national airline, Druk Air, started operating flights from Kolkata. The airport runway was extended in 1990 and Druk Air began operating jet aircraft, with direct international connections. Until 1991 tourists were handled by the Bhutan Tourism Corporation, a government agency. Tourism was privatised that year and soon numerous agencies were established, most run by ex-employees of the now-disbanded government agency.

NEPALI-SPEAKERS

In the early 20th century many Nepalis migrated to Bhutan and settled in the south of the country. They now comprise much of the population in that region, to the extent that the term Lhotshampa (southern Bhutanese) is almost synonymous with Nepali-speaker.

Although the Nepali-speakers are from many ethnic groups, the majority of them are Hindus, with traditions that are different from those of the Drukpas who live in the north of the country. Some Nepalis asserted that they faced discrimination from the Drukpas and demanded political changes as long ago as the 1950s, when the now-defunct Bhutan State Congress Party was formed.

From the 1950s the Bhutanese government took steps to integrate the ethnic Nepalis. For the first time they were granted citizenship, represented in the National Assembly, admitted into the bureaucracy and Nepali was taught as a third language in primary schools in southern Bhutan. Also, recognition was given to the festivals, customs, dress and traditions of the Lhotshampas. The Nepalis remained culturally distinct from the Bhutanese of the northern valleys. However, up until the 1980s, there seemed to be little or no conflict between the Drukpas and the Lhotshampas.

Major problems didn't really emerge until the late 1980s. At that time, the government began to focus on preserving what it saw as Bhutan's threatened national identity. It introduced a policy of *driglam namzha* (traditional values and etiquette; see p52) under which all citizens had to wear the national dress of *gho* and *kira* at schools, government offices and official functions. At the same time, as part of the implementation of the 'New Approach to Education', study of the Nepali language was eliminated from the school curriculum. Resentment began to stir among some Nepalis in the south,

The year 2007 will mark 100 years of monarchy in Bhutan; however because 2007 is an inauspicious year according to the Bhutanese calendar, Bhutan will wait until 2008 to celebrate the 100 years of Kingdom.

1980s

Government policies aimed at preserving national identity begin to polarise the Nepali-speaking southerners

1991

The start of an eventual mass movement of Nepali-speakers from Bhutan to refugee camps just over the border in Nepal

exacerbated by what the government now concedes was overzealous enforcement of the policies by some district officials.

Mindful of the country's extremely porous border – and Bhutan's attractiveness because of its fertile land, low population and free health and education facilities – in 1988 the government conducted a nationwide census. This was aimed partly at identifying illegal immigrants, defined as those who could not prove family residence before 1958. Thousands of ethnic Nepalis lacked proper documentation. A series of violent acts in the south, including robberies, assaults, rapes and murders – primarily against legitimate Bhutanese citizens of Nepali descent – created a sense of fear and insecurity that led to an exodus of Nepali-speakers from Bhutan. How much of the migration was voluntary remains a matter of fierce debate, but tens of thousands of Nepali-speakers left Bhutan between 1988 and 1993.

At the same time, a set of dissident leaders emerged charging human rights abuses in the treatment of Nepalis inside Bhutan, and demanding full democracy and other political changes in the kingdom. This movement received some international attention.

By the end of 1992, some 80,000 Nepali-speakers who said they were from Bhutan were housed in seven camps in the Jhapa district of southeastern Nepal, organised by the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). By early 1993 the exodus had virtually stopped. In June 1993 the UNHCR established a screening centre at Kakarbhitta on the Nepal-India border.

Bhutan and Nepal agreed that they would settle the problem on a bilateral basis. They have held several rounds of talks to try to identify which residents of the camps are legitimate citizens of Bhutan and to find an appropriate solution to this complex problem. After numerous meetings they agreed to a joint verification process which began in March 2001. The process was completed at the first camp, Khudanabari, in December 2001 and the goal was to close the camp on a mutually agreeable basis and continue the verification process at other camps. Unfortunately the findings of the verification process, where only 2.4% of the people in the camp were classified as genuine refugees, did

www.unhcr.org is the site for the United Nations refugee agency and provides the latest facts and figures on the refugee camps in Jhapa, Nepal.

BODO GROUPS & THE UNITED LIBERATION FRONT OF ASSAM

The northeastern region of India has suffered years of separatist violence carried out by militants, some of whom have established bases in the jungles of southern Bhutan from which they mount assaults. The actions of these groups have claimed the lives of more than 20,000 people in the Indian state of Assam.

The Bodos are Mechey tribal people that have two militant groups, the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force and the Bodo Security Force, both of which are fighting for a Bodo homeland. The United Liberation Front of Assam, more commonly known as ULFA, is a separatist group formed in 1979 with the goal of an independent Assamese nation. They have staged numerous attacks, including derailing a train with a bomb, and attacking Indian vehicles and, in July and August 2001, buses carrying Bhutanese passengers through India.

In December 2003, after the government felt it had exhausted all peaceful means, the Royal Bhutan Army, led from the front by the king, flushed out the militants from Bhutanese territory. The continued presence of these militants across the border has made travel in the southeastern part of the country risky for both Bhutanese and tourists and is the reason for restrictions on visiting such places as Royal Manas National Park and Pemagatshel.

2001

A verification process of refugees in the camps is initiated under a bilateral process between Nepal and Bhutan

2003

Disagreements over appeals from the first round of verification escalate and Bhutanese officials are attacked in one of the camps

*Of Rainbows and Clouds:
The Life of Yab Ugyen
Dorji As Told to His
Daughter* by Yab Ugyen
Dorji and Ashi Dorje
Wangmo Wangchuck is a
fascinating and intimate
account of life in Bhutan.

not satisfy the camp population and agreement on the appeal processes was not found after many months of negotiation. Frustration in the camps boiled over into a violent attack on the Bhutanese verification team at Khudunabari in December 2003, stalling the verification process.

At the end of 2005 there were 106,000 people in the camps, 10% to 15% of whom were born there. The status of the people in the camps of Jhapa is protected by the UNHCR, which uses donor support to provide the survival rations and shelter. It is likely that if the support disappears, and if the two countries cannot agree on how to resolve the crisis, those in the camps, most of them former farmers, would enter the larger diaspora of Nepali-speakers in south Asia.

2005

Announcement of the intended abdication and planned succession of the throne. Draft constitution released for the Kingdom of Bhutan

2006

Circulation of draft constitution and planned referendum for vote on its acceptance

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Buddhism permeates everyday life in Bhutan and a basic knowledge of Buddhism is essential to understanding the Bhutanese. Prayer flags dot the landscape, prayer wheels powered by mountain streams turn gently at the roadside, images of the Buddha and other religious figures are carved and painted on to cliffs, reminding the visitor that every aspect of daily life is shaped by Buddhist beliefs and aspirations. This can be daunting, even alien, for many Western visitors. The idea of accumulating merit, a deep respect of the natural and often sacred environment, respect for religious practitioners: all central elements of the unique fusion of Buddhism and older non-Buddhist beliefs.

Yet the smiles of the children walking to school in the morning light, the laughter overheard in a family house, the shy greetings from women weaving outside their homes, will quickly entrance the traveller. The Bhutanese are a warm and open people – quick to smile and laughter. As with the other peoples of the Himalayas, the Bhutanese have an infectious sense of humour and quickly overcome barriers to communication. You should not be surprised to be offered a seat and a cup of tea even if you do not speak Dzongkha or one of the other 18 languages of Bhutan. These simple acts are spontaneous and provide the traveller with both fond memories and a brief insight in to the generous nature of the Bhutanese.

DAILY LIFE

The majority of the Bhutanese population lives in central Bhutan, depending on agriculture of crops, and livestock breeding. The main crops grown in this region are rice, buckwheat, barley, potatoes and winter barley. They also grow chillies, which are dried on the roofs of houses before being stored.

Accordingly, daily life revolves around the care of livestock and farm labour. In Bumthang, where the woman is the head of the household, it will be she who decides on the division of farm labour. Bhutanese women are viewed as equal to Bhutanese men and accordingly there are only a few forms of labour traditionally viewed as exclusively male or female. Weaving and spinning have been reserved for women, while harrowing and ploughing were reserved for men. However, it is not uncommon to see a husband and wife working together ploughing their land. Other tasks such as collecting the harvest, threshing and so forth are done by men and women. Usually women brew the homemade alcohol.

Life for most rural households starts around dawn and ends with sunset. Each morning the family will make offerings, typically of water, before the household shrine and a simple breakfast of rice will be prepared. Men and women share equally in the day-to-day care of the children, and although women are usually in charge of the household, men are equally able to, and expected to, assist with the cooking. Meals are eaten sitting on the floor, often with personal bowls for rice and a selection of simple shared dishes set out in front – *ema datse*, perhaps a meat dish or some buckwheat noodles. Children are expected to help with the household and agricultural chores, like collecting water or firewood for the household, cleaning or herding the livestock.

In the evening, the water from the offering bowls will be poured away and a butter lamp may be lit and left to burn before the household shrine.

Traditionally Bhutanese were very self-sufficient, often making their own clothing, bedding, floor and seat covers, tablecloths, and decorative items for daily and religious use. There remains a degree of self-sufficiency among the

Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods (edited by C Schicklgruber and F Pommet, Serindia), is an excellent introduction to the people and culture of Bhutan.

There are 19 spoken languages in Bhutan.

There are approximately 15,000 lay or married monks, called *ngakpa* or *gomchen*.

DOMA

Doma is an integral part of Bhutanese culture. A popular gift throughout Bhutanese society, it is made up of three main ingredients: *doma* or areca nut (Areca catechu), *pani* or betel leaf (Piper betel), and *tsune* or lime (calcium carbonate).

According to Bhutanese tradition, in 1637 a huge gathering of people had come with a variety of food products to offer to the Zhabdrung in Punakha. Deeply touched by their gesture, the Zhabdrung instructed that those present should be served with various gifts of food and *doma pani*. JC White, the British political officer who attended Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck's enthronement in 1907, reports that *doma* was served to those attending the enthronement.

Eating *doma* was an aristocratic practice, with the various ingredients kept in ornate rectangular silver boxes called *chaka*, while lime had a separate circular box with conical lid called *trimi*. Today, people may keep their *doma* in bamboo *bangchung* or a cloth pouch called a *kaychung*. Young people appear to be turning away from eating *doma*, particularly as it may cause a variety of cancers.

rural Bhutanese, though many day-to-day items are increasingly imported from Bangladesh, India and Thailand.

Marriage

In the past, marriages were arranged. However, since the 1970s the majority of marriages are love matches. The minimum age is sixteen for women and twenty-one for men. In rural areas, it is quite common for the husband to move into his wife's household and if they divorce he will return to live with his own family.

Polyandry, the practice of taking more than one husband, still exists in certain parts of Bhutan and polygamy is restricted. There remains a large number of Bhutanese couples who, although living together as a couple, are not formally married. The divorce rate is increasing and there is legal provision for alimony to be paid to take care of children.

Death

The frescoes of the Wheel of Life show that, to Bhutanese, death is part of the cycle of samsara separating loved ones and leading to rebirth. Accordingly, death is treated as a major life event. Family and friends are informed and monks, *gomchen* (lay or married monks) or nuns begin to recite from the *Bardo Thodrel* to guide the deceased through the intermediate phase.

A *tsip* (astrologer) will be consulted to decide on the most auspicious date and time to hold the cremation. Until the cremation, the deceased is placed in a wooden box and covered in a white cloth and kept separate from the family. At the cremation, the corpse is placed on the pyre facing the officiating lama. The first funeral service is held on the seventh day after death, with other rituals performed on the 14th, 21st and the 49th days. The lama reminds the deceased that they are dead and during the ritual seeks to help them move on to their next and (it is hoped) fortunate rebirth, either as a human being or preferably in a buddha realm.

At the end of the 49 days the ashes of the deceased may be scattered; some are placed in a sacred image and donated to a monastery or temple. The anniversary of the death will be marked for the following three years.

BHUTANESE SOCIETY

Bhutan was relatively isolated until the early 1950s and traditional Bhutan has changed more in the last 50 years than in the previous 400 years. The country has retained its traditional social structures so far and has actively

In 2003, 46.6% of Bhutanese earned their livelihood from farming. Almost one third of Bhutanese now earn a salary.

The largest monthly expenditures for a Bhutanese family are on food and rent.

sought to preserve its cultural identity in the face of modernisation and increasing external influences.

Until the 1960s there were no major urban settlements. Since then Thimphu and Phuentsholing have grown significantly and this has led to pressure on land in these areas. Elsewhere there has been an increase in land acquisition, notably in Gelephu.

As a result of the opportunities created by education and the creation of alternative employment (as civil servants, teachers, armed forces or police), Bhutan has experienced increased social mobility. The rate of rural-urban migration is increasing, particularly as young educated Bhutanese seek employment in offices and other businesses in the capital. There has been growing concern over the increasing unemployment rate among the educated school leavers.

The Living Standard Survey 2003 revealed that 34% of Bhutanese now rely on salaries as their main source of income, and 46% on agriculture. It revealed that in urban areas the average monthly household expenditure was more than Nu 11,100 and about Nu 6,250 in the countryside. For many living in urban areas this figure can represent all or most of their salary which is why many Bhutanese women now work in offices or seek to supplement their husband's income through some form of small business enterprise.

Education

Until the introduction of Western-style education by the third king in the 1960s, the only education available in Bhutan was from the monasteries. Prior to this a few students travelled to Darjeeling to receive a secular education. The Western-style education has expanded to cover the whole country.

The educational structure provides for 11 years of basic schooling: one year of pre-primary schooling, six years of primary, two years of junior high school and two years of high school. Students undergo an examination to move from primary to junior high, and another to graduate from junior high to high school.

The school system aims to provide basic literacy skills, and knowledge of Bhutan's history, geography and traditions. Most villages have a primary school, though it is not uncommon for children to board at a junior high school or high school. Free education and textbooks are provided to all students until tertiary level. Morning prayers and the national anthem start the day for all students throughout Bhutan. The government provides adult education classes, especially aimed at improving literacy.

A key aspect of Bhutan's development plan involves training doctors, engineers and other professionals. Important trade skills in plumbing, construction and electricians are now being taught to both young men and women. In 2003 the Royal University of Bhutan was established to provide tertiary education in Bhutan. All the existing tertiary institutions were incorporated in the new University.

Health

Bhutan has made significant progress in its provision of basic health facilities and provides free health care to all its citizens. The main hospital is the National Referral Hospital in Thimphu, and two further regional referral hospitals. There are smaller hospitals in each district. Rural health care is provided through Basic Health Units staffed with a health assistant, nurse midwife and a basic health worker.

Child immunisation is now at almost 100%, and iodine deficiency has been eliminated. Infant and maternal mortality rates have decreased. According to the 2005 census, over 80% of Bhutanese have access to clean drinking water.

For more information on education in the Himalayas, and on supporting young students, see www.loden.org.

The Youth Development Fund promotes a range of educational activities, including scouting and career counselling.

A survey in 2003 revealed that over 80% of food in Bhutan was imported, including rice and dairy products.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Historically, Bhutan was referred to as the 'Land of Medicinal Herbs' and exported herbs to Tibet. Bhutanese were trained in medicine, known as So-ba Rig pa. It represents a blending of Ayurveda from India – notably the use of the three humours (bile, phlegm and wind) – with Chinese medicine, in the reading of pulses. The earliest medical works date from the 7th and 8th centuries and the main medical teachings are believed to have been transmitted from the Medicine Buddha, Sangey Menlha. They are contained in four volumes, called the Gyuzhi.

When the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal came to Bhutan, he brought with him a highly esteemed physician, Tenzin Drukey, who spread the teachings on So-ba Rig pa in Bhutan. Although the basic texts are the same, the Bhutanese tradition of So-ba Rig pa developed independently from its Tibetan origins. Since 1967 the Bhutanese tradition has been formally incorporated in to the national health system.

The decision about the kind of treatment necessary for a particular condition is made mainly through reading of the pulses. Unlike modern medicine, which only uses reading of pulses to detect anomalies of the heart or the circulatory system, using the So-ba Rig pa method it is possible to detect diseases of organs through the pulses. The eyes, tongue and urine are also examined for signs that will help with the diagnosis, and sometimes the physician will record the patient's medical history.

Several forms of treatment are applied in Bhutanese traditional medicine. Hundreds of medicinal plants, minerals and animal parts form the basic medicines used by the practitioner. These basic ingredients are processed and mixed in different combinations to make 300 medicines in the form of pills, tablets, syrups, powders and lotions. The practitioner may also offer advice on, or treatment for, diet and lifestyle.

There are also procedures that include *gtar* (bloodletting), *bsregs* (cauterisation by herbal compounds), *gser bcos* (acupuncture with a golden needle), *tshug* (cauterisation with instruments of different materials), *dugs* (applying heat or cold to parts of the body), *byugs pa* (medicated oil massage), *sman chu* (stone heated bath), *tsha-chhu* (bath at a hot spring, such as the springs in Gasa), and *lum* (vapour treatment).

Although Bhutan has tackled endemic health problems, it is also facing the emergence of HIV and AIDS. The Bhutanese authorities have taken a proactive stance, emphasising the importance of safe sex and awareness of HIV. Monks and nuns have been trained (in addition to teaching rural communities about basic hygiene) to provide advice on HIV and to act as HIV counsellors for those infected. In August 2004 the King issued a *kasho* (royal command or statement) stressing the threat of HIV and the need to show compassion towards those infected.

Personal Names

The system of names in Bhutan differs between the north and south of the country. In the north, with the exception of the royal family, there are no family names. Two names are given to children by monks a few weeks after birth. These are traditional names of Tibetan origin and are chosen because of their auspicious influence or religious meaning. Two names are always given, although a few people have three names.

It is often impossible to tell the sex of a Bhutanese person based on their name. A few names are given only to boys, and others apply only to girls, for example Choekyi, Drolma and Wangmo, but most names may apply to either.

In the south, with an evident Hindu influence, a system resembling family names exists. Brahmans and Newars retain their caste name, such as Sharma or Pradhan, and others retain the name of their ethnic group, such as Rai or Gurung.

The 160 Basic Health Units cover 90% of the population.

TITLES & FORMS OF ADDRESS

Titles are extremely important. All persons of rank should be addressed by the appropriate title followed by their first or full name. Members of the royal family are addressed as 'Dasho' if they are male, and 'Ashi' if female. A minister has the title 'Lyonpo' (pronounced 'lonpo').

The title Dasho is given to those who have been honoured by the king, receiving also the accompanying red scarf. In common practice, many senior government officials are addressed as Dasho even if they have not received the title, but officially this is incorrect.

You would address a senior monk or teacher with the title 'Lopon' (pronounced 'loeboen') or, if he has been given the title, as Lam. A *trulku* (reincarnate lama) is addressed as 'Rinpoche' and a nun as 'Anim'.

A man is addressed as 'Aap' and a boy as 'Busu'; a woman is addressed as 'Am' and a girl as 'Bum'. If you are calling someone whose name you do not know, you may use 'Ama' for women and 'Aapa' for men. In the same situation, girls are 'Bumo' and boys 'Alou'. When Bhutanese talk about a foreigner whose name they don't know, they use the word 'Chilip' or, in eastern Bhutan 'Pilingpa'.

At night, do not shout a person's name, as it's believed this may attract a ghost.

White silk scarves called *kata* are exchanged as customary greetings among ranking officials and are offered to high lamas as a sign of respect, but they are not exchanged as frequently as they are in Tibet and Nepal.

Traditional Dress

Bhutan's traditional dress is one of the most distinctive and visible aspects of the country. It is compulsory for all Bhutanese to wear national dress in schools, government offices and formal occasions. Men, women and children wear traditional clothing made from Bhutanese textiles in a variety of colourful patterns.

GHO

The men wear a *gho*, a long robe similar to the Tibetan *chuba*. The Bhutanese hoist the *gho* to knee length and hold it in place with a woven cloth belt called a *ker*a. The *ker*a is wound tightly around the waist, and the large pouch formed above it is traditionally used to carry a bowl, money and the makings of *doma*. One man suggested that the best part of the day was when he was able to loosen his uncomfortably tight belt.

According to tradition, men should carry a small knife called a *dozum* at the waist. Traditional footwear is knee-high, embroidered leather boots, but these are now worn only at festivals. Most Bhutanese men wear leather shoes, trainers or trekking boots.

Ghos come in a wide variety of patterns, though often they have plaid or striped designs reminiscent of Scottish tartans. Flowered patterns are taboo, and solid reds and yellows are avoided because these are colours worn by monks; otherwise patterns have no special significance. Historically, Bhutanese men wore the same thing under their *gho* that a true Scotsman wears under his kilt, but today it's usually a pair of shorts. In winter it's correct to wear thermal underwear, but it's more often a pair of jeans or a track suit, which gives the costume a peculiar look that some people liken to a dressing gown. Formality in Thimphu dictates that legs may not be covered until winter has arrived, which is defined as the time that the monks move to Punakha.

Formal occasions, including a visit to the dzong, require a scarf called a *kabney* that identifies a person's rank. The *kabney* has to be put on correctly so it hangs in exactly the right way. In dzongs, and on formal occasions, a *dasho* or someone in authority carries a long sword called a *patang*.

According to the 2005 Census, male literacy is at 69% and female literacy at 51%.

DOS & DON'TS

Despite the deep religious belief and the pervasiveness of traditional culture, Bhutanese are quite open and liberal. They have a reputation for being the least complicated Asian people to communicate with. There are many complex customs and traditions in Bhutan, but you are not expected to follow all of these.

If you are courteous and respectful of religious beliefs, you are unlikely to cause offence. Using the word *la* at the end of a sentence in either Dzongkha or English is a sign of respect, eg *kuzo zangpo la* (hello).

You should also follow the normal Asian standards of courtesy and behaviour in Bhutan. These include respect for the monarchy, modest dress and no public displays of affection. Use the right hand or, better yet, both hands to give or receive an object. Don't use your finger to point, especially at deities or religious objects; use an open hand with the palm up. When waving someone towards you, keep your palm pointing down. Never touch the crown of the head, for example of a young child; this is considered a special part of the body.

Most lakes are the abode of gods or spirits. Don't swim, wash clothes or throw stones into them.

Visiting Temples

Himalayan Buddhism has a generally relaxed approach to religious sites, but you should observe a few important rules if you are invited to enter a lhakhang or goemba. It is customary to remove one's shoes and hat upon entering the important rooms of a temple. You will most likely be escorted by a caretaker monk, and you can follow his example in removing your shoes at the appropriate doorway. Leave cameras, umbrellas and hats outside. Always move in a clockwise direction and do not speak loudly. If there is a ceremony being performed inside, always check before entering that it's OK.

Followers of Himalayan Buddhism will prostrate themselves three times before the primary altar and occasionally before secondary shrines to important saints. You may approach the central altar, and in Bhutanese goembas you will often find a cup containing three dice. Bhutanese roll these dice and the monk interprets the auspiciousness of the result. It is customary to leave a small offering of money (Nu 10) on the altar. When you make this offering, the monk accompanying you will pour a small amount of holy water, from a sacred vessel called a *bumpa*, into your hand. You should make the gesture of drinking a sip of this water and then spread the rest on your head. While male visitors may be permitted (please ask before entering) to enter the *goenkhang* (shrine dedicated to protector deities), this is off-limits to all women. Do not walk behind an altar set before the *goenkhang*.

KIRA

Women wear a long floor-length dress called a *kira*. This is a rectangular piece of brightly coloured cloth that wraps around the body over a Tibetan-style silk blouse called a *wonju*. The *kira* is fastened at the shoulders with elaborate silver hooks called *koma* and at the waist with a belt that may be of either silver or cloth. Over the top is worn a short, open, jacket-like garment called a *toego*. Women often wear large amounts of jewellery. The whole ensemble is beautiful and Bhutanese women are very elegant in their finery.

The *kira* may be made from cotton or silk and may have a pattern on one or both sides. For everyday wear, women wear a *kira* made from striped cloth with a double-sided design, and on more formal occasions they wear a *kira* with an embellished pattern woven into it. The most expensive *kira* are *kushutara* (brocade dresses), which are made of hand-spun, hand-woven Bhutanese cotton, embroidered with various colours and designs in raw silk or cotton thread. Lhuentse is known for its *kushutara* designs.

The Laya women are particularly noted for their distinctive conical bamboo hats and long black wool dresses.

Driglam Namzhag (Bhutanese Etiquette) is a manual published by the National Library of Bhutan and is a good introduction (available in English).

Feet & Face

As in all Asian countries, you should never point your feet at someone. If you are sitting on the floor, cross your legs or kneel so that your feet are pointed behind you. If you happen to sleep in a room where there is an altar or statue, ensure your feet do not point towards it.

The Asian concept of keeping face also applies in Bhutan. Try to suggest instead of insist. When things go wrong, as they are certain to do at some stage, be patient while your guide figures out a solution. Remember, Asian people dislike saying 'no'. If your request to visit a certain landmark, order a particular dish in a restaurant or depart at a specified time is met with an obviously lame excuse, this probably means that it is impossible.

Photography

A camera is still a curiosity in most of Bhutan, particularly in remote villages, and your camera may draw a curious crowd. See p251 for advice on photographing people. Photography is not allowed inside any temples; don't embarrass your guide by asking. If you are attending a festival, do not let your picture-taking interfere with the dancers or block the view of the spectators.

Dress

Asian standards of modesty apply. Both men and women should avoid wearing revealing clothing, including short shorts, halter-neck tops and tank tops. Nudity is completely unacceptable.

Resident expatriates in Thimphu are adamant that visitors should dress up when attending a tshechu or other festival. Bhutanese are too polite to suggest it, and would not openly criticise those who did not dress correctly, but they do appreciate the gesture. Bhutanese are flattered if foreigners wear traditional dress, and are more than happy to help you buy, and put on, a *gho* or *kira* – which is not an easy process.

If you have an appointment with a government official, correct dress is required. Policemen at the entrance to dzongs will refuse admission to anyone who is improperly dressed.

Social Occasions

If you are invited to a Bhutanese home, it's appropriate to bring a small gift, perhaps a bottle of wine or box of sweets. Social occasions tend to start late and involve extended rounds of drinks before dinner, often with several visitors dropping by for a short time. The evening is quickly concluded once dinner is finished.

When visiting dzongs, women wear a cloth sash called a *rachu* over their shoulders or simply over their left shoulder in the same manner as men wear a *kabney*.

POPULATION

Western Bhutan, stretching from Haa to Wangdue Phodrang, is inhabited by the Ngalong, who are thought to be descended from Tibetan immigrants who moved to the region in the 9th century. and in the east are the Sharchop (literally, 'the people from the east'). The Sharchop are believed the first inhabitants of Bhutan, with their own distinctive language. These three groups comprise about approximately 75% of the population.

In the cold high mountains to the north lie Lingzhi, Laya, Gasa and Lunana. The inhabitants of these remote regions are descended from Tibetan immigrants. In winter, due to the remoteness and the heavy snow falls, many of the families from Lingzhi move down to stay with host families in Paro, and similarly families from Laya move to the Punakha area. On the eastern border of Bhutan with Arunachal Pradesh in India are the seminomadic communities of the Brokpa in Merak Sakteng, who still practice polyandry.

The Centre for Bhutan Studies has an excellent website with online access to the Journal of Bhutan Studies. See www.bhutanstudies.org.bt.

Along the southern border of Bhutan, immigrants from Nepal began settling in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They began clearing and cultivating the dense jungle and sought to break free from the rigid caste system of Nepal. They are called Lhotshampa (literally, 'the people of the southern border') and represent numerous Nepali-speaking ethnic groups – primarily Brahman, Chettri, Gurung, Rai and Limbu, but also Newars. They are mainly Hindu and form approximately 25% of the population.

In 1971, when Bhutan applied for UN membership, the population was estimated at just less than one million. No census data existed and government officials estimated the population as best they could, choosing to err on the high side in order to help gain world recognition. Over the years, this figure was adjusted upwards in accordance with estimates of Bhutan's population-growth figures, finally reaching the 1.2 million figure. In some publications this total has even been listed at 2.3 million!

According to the 2005 Census, the current population of Bhutan is 672,425. The Census revealed that the number of urban dwellers has increased to 31%. As a result of a family-planning advocacy campaign the population growth rate is 1.3% per year, down from 3.1% in 1994, which was then one of the highest in the world. As in many non-industrialised countries, the high infant-mortality rate in the past induced people to have more children. With the introduction of better medical facilities, many more children now survive.

As a result of both improved infrastructure and rural–urban migration, 58% of the population now lives within an hour's walk from the nearest motorable road. This marks a significant change from the last census when an estimated 80% of the population lived more than an hour's walk from a road and as much as 50% lived more than one day of walking from a motorable road.

LANGUAGES

There are 19 languages spoken in Bhutan. The Ngalong people speak Dzongkha, which became the national language in 1960. It is related to Tibetan, but is sufficiently different that Tibetans cannot understand it. Dzongkha is written in the same script as Tibetan, but the orthography has been made more Bhutanese.

Nepali is spoken amongst the Lhotshampa communities in the southern districts and is often spoken by northern Bhutanese. Nepali and English are the two most widely used *lingua franca* whenever Bhutanese have a com-

DRIGLAM NAMZHA

The Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal established a code of etiquette for monastic and government officials. Over the centuries this system of etiquette spread to lay people. Called *driglam namzha*, the code of conduct specifies how to dress when visiting a dzong, the polite way to greet one's boss and officials, the correct way to sit, eat and so forth. Many of the ceremonies one sees performed at the start of an official event (*chipdrel, marchang*), or an archery match are part of *driglam namzha*.

The government has actively promoted *driglam namzha* since 1989 in an attempt to preserve Bhutanese traditions, notably enforcing the requirement to wear *gho* and *kira* when visiting government offices, dzongs and temples.

Closely linked to *driglam namzha*, *thadamtshi* refers to the Bhutanese belief in respect towards ones' parents, elders, and other members of the community. Based on the Buddhist teachings on devotion, *thadamtshi* is an important concept in Bhutanese society. It is often illustrated by the story of the Four Friends (see the boxed text, p57).

Linked to *thadamtshi* and less formal than *driglam namzha* is the concept of *bey cha*. *Bey cha* emphasises the aesthetics of performing everyday tasks gracefully and with care and consideration for others.

A good website for additional information and news on Bhutan is www.bhutansearch.com.

For more information on the languages of Bhutan see George Van Driem's *Dzongkha* (1998), which contains a clear overview of the different languages spoken.

munication problem. For more on Dzongkha, and language in Bhutan, see p275.

RELIGION

Buddhism is practised throughout the country though, in the south, most Bhutanese people of Nepali and Indian descent are Hindu. Relations between Buddhists and Hindus are very good, with major Hindu festivals marked by national holidays. Minority groups practise various forms of ancient animistic religions, including Bon, which predates Himalayan Buddhism. Bhutanese Buddhism is discussed in more depth on p63.

MEDIA

In 1999, to mark the 25th anniversary of the coronation of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, TV and satellite channels were permitted in Bhutan. Since then there has been rapid growth in the number of small cable providers throughout Bhutan. There have been deep concerns expressed about the negative impact of satellite TV on Bhutanese society. It is too early to say if it is damaging Bhutanese society. Rather, those problems which are arising perhaps reflect the problems of urbanisation and changing material aspirations.

There was a recent move to increase the diversity of independently run media in Bhutan. *Kuensel* was, until recently, the only national newspaper. Originally government owned, *Kuensel* was privatised in 1992. Since April 2006 the *Bhutan Times* and the *Bhutan Observer* are have become available. A media act passed by the National Assembly in 2006 caused a great deal of comment in editorials and from Bhutanese film makers (for more on this issue, see www.kuenselonline.com).

The Bhutan Broadcasting Service is government run and provides both TV and radio services. It is worth tuning into the TV channel to hear the news in English and to catch locally produced features and foreign documentaries. The radio channel does not operate all the time and has a schedule printed in *Kuensel*. Since the official introduction of satellite TV in 1999 Bhutanese have been learning about WWF – not the World Wildlife Fund, rather the World Wrestling Federation (and other novelties). Various sections of Bhutanese society expressed concern over the impact of TV on young Bhutanese and, in 2005, several channels were blocked.

Internet is available in Bhutan and is gradually being introduced throughout the country. In Thimphu there are a growing number of internet cafés which are popular with young Bhutanese. Druknet originally attempted to screen certain sites but found that it was too expensive to maintain. A second internet provider, Drukcom, began operation 2004. Since then, the internet has been unrestricted.

WOMEN IN BHUTAN

Compared to other areas of south Asia, Bhutanese women enjoy greater equality and freedom with men. The right to inherit often passes property to women rather than men.

In rural areas women often inherit the house and the family land. Traditionally, women look after the household, preparing food and weaving textiles for family use and for sale. However, they also work in the fields, notably at harvest times when all available labour is required. Decisions affecting the household are jointly made. Travelling in Bhutan you will notice that Bhutanese women are independently minded and possess a strong entrepreneurial spirit. In Thimphu and the emerging urban centres such as Trongsa, Gelephu and Phuentsholing, women may seek to boost family income by engaging in trade, selling goods from home or renting a small shop.

There are approximately 5,500 monks in Bhutan, half under the patronage of the Je Khenpo, the other half subsidised by private patronage.

You can read current and archived stories at www.kuenselonline.com.

HM Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck is the UN Goodwill Ambassador in Bhutan.

Rural women are often presented as the custodians of traditional values, while urban women face a different set of challenges. Urbanisation and increasing rural-urban migration have brought new challenges for women separated from their families and social networks.

The introduction of education in the 1960s enabled Bhutanese women to become literate and to seek employment outside of both their homes and their local villages. Teaching, the civil service and other office positions provided important opportunities for young, educated Bhutanese women.

However, there are areas in which Bhutanese women are still not equal with their male counterparts. Levels of literacy remain higher among men than women, though this is being tackled by the government through adult learning classes. Although some women have been appointed to higher positions in the government and NGOs, including the first female district court judge appointed in 2003, there do still appear to be barriers preventing educated and able women access to all levels of government. During the first universal suffrage *gup* (elected village leader) elections in 2002, there were no women candidates in any *gewog* (the lowest administrative level), and the proportion of women who voted compared to the number eligible to vote was significantly lower than for male voters.

The major women's organisation in the country is the National Women's Association of Bhutan. It was established in 1981 and headed by Dasho Dawa Dem, one of the few women to have received the honorific title of Dasho from the king. In 2004 Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW), a new NGO for women, was established by HM Ashi Sangay Choeden Wangchuck. RENEW is highly respected and tackles major issues facing contemporary Bhutanese women. In the same year a National Commission on Women and Children was established to promote the rights of women and children.

ARTS

All Bhutanese art, dance, drama, music and even architecture have their roots in Buddhism. The highly distinctive architecture of Bhutan is discussed on p78. Paintings were traditionally done not for sale, but for specific purposes – though this is slowly changing. Festivals are not quaint reinventions staged for tourists, but are living manifestations of a long tradition and national faith. Almost all representation in art, music and dance is a dramatisation of the Buddha's teachings about the path to liberation and the constant struggle to overcome the delusions that lead to the cycle of rebirth in *samsara*. Bhutanese arts are concerned with interpreting values rather than describing facts.

The Artistic Tradition in Bhutan

The development of Buddhist arts and crafts in Bhutan can be traced to the 15th-century *terton* (discoverer of sacred texts) Pema Lingpa, who was an accomplished painter, metal worker, sculptor and architect. The country's artistic tradition received a further boost when, in 1680, the fourth *desi* (secular ruler), Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (1680–94), opened the School of Bhutanese Arts and Crafts, which has evolved into the National Institute for Zorig Chusum.

Traditional Bhutanese artistry is maintained through the support of all levels of society. The royal family, nobility and clergy continue to provide important patronage. Meanwhile, the common people support the arts because they depend on artisans to provide the wide variety of wooden and metal objects indispensable to typical Bhutanese households and painting, both inside and outside of homes.

Bhutanese art has two main characteristics: it is religious and anonymous. The Bhutanese consider commissioning paintings and statues as pious acts, which gain merit for the *jinda* (patron). The name of the *jinda* is sometimes

More information on RENEW can be found at www.renew.org.bt.

The non-state-funded Choki Traditional Art School in Kabesa offers free training to young students from poor families. See www.chokischool.com.

written on the work so that their pious act may be remembered. However, the artist's name is rarely ever mentioned, although there are some artists whose names do become well-known due to the exceptional quality of their work.

There are strict iconographical conventions in Bhutanese art and the Bhutanese artists observe them scrupulously. However, artists do express their own personality in minor details (eg the shading of clouds or background scenes). Paintings and sculptures are executed by monks or laymen who work in special workshops. The disciples of a master, as part of their training will do all the preliminary work, while the fine work is executed by the master himself.

The Thirteen Arts

The Thirteen Arts are the 13 traditional arts and crafts (Zorig Chusum) believed to have been categorised during the reign of the fourth *desi*, Tenzin Rabgye. Zorig Chusum refers to those physical activities which assist, teach or uplift others.

SHINGZO (CARPENTRY)

Skilled carpenters are involved in a range of activities ranging from building dzongs and temples, houses and palaces, to making tools and other practical instruments.

DOZO (MASONRY)

This covers the building of stupas, dzongs and temples as well as making the heavy millstones and stone pestles.

PARZO (CARVING)

The Bhutanese are highly skilled at wood, stone and slate carving. Examples of their work are evident throughout Bhutan, from the slate carvings depicting the Buddha and other religious figures inserted in stupas, to the wooden printing blocks used for printing sacred texts.

LHAZO (PAINTING)

Lhazo encompasses drawing and painting in Bhutan. It includes the painting of *thangkhas* (religious pictures), murals and frescoes in temples and dzongs as well as the colourful images on the exterior walls of Bhutanese homes. Drawing and painting are governed by strict geometric rules of proportion and iconography. For more on *lhazo* see p56.

JINZO (SCULPTURE)

Perhaps one of the arts in which the Bhutanese excel is the creation of delicate clay sculptures, occasionally set in amazing landscapes. These sculptures, ranging from small- to large-scale statues, are generally created around a hollow frame with the mud or clay built up to form the image. In 1999 the King awarded the Druk Thugsey medal (Heart Son of Bhutan) to sculptor Lopen Omtong, which reflects the high Bhutanese esteem for sculpture.

As well as statues, *jinzo* includes the production of a range of ritual items, notably the moulded offerings (*torma*) and masks worn during *tsechu*, and the more prosaic activity of preparing mud walls on new buildings.

LUGZO (CASTING)

Casting, usually in bronze, refers to the production of musical instruments, statues, tools and kitchen utensils, as well as slip casting for pottery and jewellery.

If you are interested in actually creating your own Bhutanese art, look out for *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials* by David P Jackson and Janice A Jackson.

The 2005 Census revealed that Thimphu is the most populated *dzongkhag*, with 98,676 people, and Gasa the least populated, with 3,116 people.

GARZO (BLACKSMITHING)

Generally, these craftsmen produce axes, plough blades, chains, knives and swords and other practical items.

TROKO (GOLD- AND SILVERSMITHING)

This includes all ornaments made from gold, silver or copper. They are often cut out, beaten, drawn or engraved.

TSHAZO (BAMBOO WORK)

There is a wide variety of these products, as seen in the Sunday market. They include *bangchung* (covered bowls with intricate designs, used to carry food), long *palang* (used to store beer or other liquor), the *tshesip* (box), *belo* (small hat worn for sun protection), *redi* (floor mat), *luchu* (used for storing grain), *balep* (bamboo thatch) and of course, the bow and arrow.

THAGZO (WEAVING)

Thagzo covers the whole process: from the preparation of the yarn, dyeing and the numerous designs. This is the largest craft industry in terms of the variety and number of craftspeople involved throughout Bhutan. See opposite for more on *thagzo*.

TSTEMZO (EMBROIDERY)

There are two special categories within this craft. The first are those items which are sewn and embroidered (ranging from clothing to intricate and rare embroidered *thangkas*). The second refers to appliqué and patchwork items made from stitching cloth together. This includes the large *thondrols* displayed in the dzongs during tsechu, as well as hats and the elaborate boots worn with the *gho* on official occasions.

SHAGZO (WOODTURNING)

Skilled wood turners produce a range of delicate wooden bowls, turned with expertise from special parts of a tree or roots. The large wooden *dapa* (serving dishes), wooden plates, buckets, ladles and *phop* (small cups), as well as the various small hand drums beaten during religious ceremonies, are among the products of this craft.

DEZO (PAPERMAKING)

The art of making paper from the daphne plant, and more recently bamboo and rice stalks, is under threat from the loss of skilled craftsmen.

Painting

Aside from spectacular architecture, the most visible manifestation of Bhutanese art is painting. There are three forms of painting: *thangkas*, wall paintings and statues. A painting is invariably religious in nature depicting a deity, a religious story, a meditational object or an array of auspicious symbols (such as the Tashi Tagye or Four Friends).

Paintings, in particular the portrayal of human figures, are subject to strict rules of iconography. The proportions and features must be precise, and there is no latitude for artistic licence in these works. The initial layout is constructed with a series of geometrical patterns, using straight lines to lay out the proportions of the figure, which are defined in religious documents called *zuri pata*. In other cases the initial sketch is made with a stencil of the basic outline, which is transferred to the canvas by patting the stencil with a bag filled with chalk dust. Traditionally, paints were made from earth, minerals and vegetables, though now chemical colours are also used. The

According to a survey in 2001, 60% of rural land-owners are women and 45% of urban property and business is owned by women.

Written works by non-Bhutanese are available as well – notable among them is *Beyond the Sky and the Earth* by Jamie Zeppa.

THE FOUR FRIENDS

One of Bhutan's favourite fables is that of the four friends. In Dzongkha the name of the story is *Thuenga puen shi* (Cooperation, relation, four) and it illustrates the concept of teamwork. You will see paintings illustrating this story on temples, homes and shops throughout the country.

The story tells how the elephant, monkey, peacock and rabbit combined forces to obtain a continual supply of fruit. The peacock found a seed and planted it, the rabbit watered it, the monkey fertilised it and the elephant guarded it. When the fruit was ripe the tree was so high that they could not reach the top. The four animals made a tower by climbing on one another's back, and plucked the fruit from the high branches.

material is first reduced into powder and then mixed with water, glue and chalk. The brushes are handmade from twigs and animal hair.

Thangkas are painted on canvas that is stretched and lashed to a wooden frame. When the work is completed it is removed from the frame and surrounded by a border of colourful brocade, with wooden sticks at the top and bottom used for hanging. Although some *thangkas* are hung permanently, most are rolled up and stored until they are exhibited at special occasions. This applies particularly to the huge appliqué *thondrols* that are displayed briefly in the early morning during the annual tsechus. The same iconographical rules apply to the *thondrol* which demonstrate the skills of the Bhutanese tailors.

The inner walls of dzongs and lhakhangs are usually covered with paintings. In Bhutan most wall murals are painted on a thin layer of cloth applied to the wall using a special paste. Nowadays, old paintings are treasured because of their historic and artistic value; however, until quite recently old wall paintings were often repainted or even painted over during restoration work.

Most statues are finely painted to sharply define the facial features, which are individualised for each figure. Many religious statues in lhakhangs, especially the larger statues, are made from unfired clay. In addition to the face, the entire surface of these large figures is painted, often in a gold colour, giving them a bronze aspect. Examples of these statues can be seen in Punakha dzong. On bronze statues, some of which are quite small, only the face is painted.

The focus for the contemporary art scene is the Volunteer Artist Studio in Thimphu (VAST), a voluntary organisation that provides art classes to young Bhutanese, which seeks to combine traditional styles with western art techniques and subjects. In Paro, the local artist Chime Dorji has opened the Vajrayana Art Gallery.

Textiles

Weaving, more than the other Zorig Chusum, is the most distinctive and sophisticated of the arts and crafts. The richness of this art form can be seen at the permanent exhibition in the National Textile Museum in Thimphu. Everyday articles such as clothing, wrappers for goods, and cushion covers are stitched from cloth woven at home. Until the mid-20th century, certain taxes were paid in cloth and collected at the regional dzong. The authorities distributed the cloth as 'payment' to monastic and civil officials and to monasteries. Until quite recently, it was common to present cloth as a gift to mark special occasions or promotions. Bhutanese women still have trunks filled with fine fabrics which may be sold when money is required.

Although some men do practice weaving, the majority of weavers are women. Unlike *thangka* painting, which has very precise religious rules, weaving provides the weaver an opportunity to express herself. Designs, colours, sizes and even the finish have always reflected the materials available and the changes in technology and fashion. Bhutan's weavers specialise

in working additional decorative warps and wefts into the 'ground' fabric. The most elaborate weavings are usually for the traditional *kira* and *gho* and these garments may take up to a year to weave in silk.

Each region has its own weaving traditions and designs, with that of Lhuentse, the ancestral home of the royal family, being the most renowned. The weavers in Lhuentse specialise in decorating *kira* and other textiles with intricate patterns that resemble embroidery. Other parts of eastern Bhutan are famous for their distinctive striped garments woven from raw silk. Bumthang weavers produce another popular fabric – *yathra*, hand-woven strips of woolen cloth, stitched into blankets, jackets, cushion covers and even car seats.

Though *yathra* was traditionally produced on back-strap looms, pedal looms were introduced from Tibet in the mid-20th century, whilst Indian spinning wheels are faster than the drop spindle. Today, all these technologies can be seen being used by weavers in their homes.

More recently, with assistance from the government, new items such as bags, decorations and even bed and table linen have been developed both for the local and international markets.

Literature

The development of *jo yig*, the cursive Bhutanese script, as distinct from a Tibetan script, is credited to a monk by the name of Lotsawa Denma Tsemang. However, the Bhutanese script is based on the Tibetan script introduced by Tonmi Sambhota during the reign of the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo. For the most part, the literary culture of Bhutan has been dominated by Buddhism; first as a means of translating Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit, and second as local scholars began to emerge, as a means of developing Himalayan Buddhist thought.

Wood-block printing has been used for centuries and is still the most common form of printing in the monasteries. Blocks are carved in mirror-image, then the printers working in pairs place strips of handmade paper over the inked blocks and a roller passes over the paper. The printed strip is then set aside to dry. The printed books are placed between two boards and wrapped in cloth. There is an excellent exhibition in the National Library showing the printing process as well as examples of rare texts.

The development of a modern, nonreligious literary culture is still emerging in Bhutan. In recent years local presses have published a range of popular religious works, notably the biographies of *delog*. These biographies retell the experiences of women who have 'died' and visited the various hell and pure realms described in Buddhist teachings. These women then 'return' to life and encouraged people to lead good lives and follow the teachings of Buddha. Other contemporary works published in Dzongkha are on Bhutanese history, notably the work by Lupon Pemala, *Druk Karpo* (White Dragon) and an excellent biography of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The Centre for Bhutan Studies, established in 2000, publishes a range of academic studies on Bhutan in both English and Dzongkha.

Contemporary Bhutanese writers, usually writing in English, such as Kunzang Choeden, have produced short stories and collections of folktales from throughout Bhutan. Kunzang Choeden's book *Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti* has an excellent selection of local stories about the *migo*, or yeti. She recently published *The Circle of Karma*. Sonam Kinga has written a few short plays in Dzongkha and translated the *Songs of Sorrow* by Gyalong Sumdar Tashi. Karma Ura published two excellent books in the 1990s. The first is a translation of the popular Dzongkha *loze* (ballad), *The Ballad of Pema Tshewang*. It tells the tale of Tshewang Tashi, a chamberlain to the governor of Wangdue Phodrang, who is chosen to lead a campaign against the governor

Thomas Slocum wrote *In His Majesty's Civil Service*, a collection of short stories set in Bhutan.

Delog: Journey to realms beyond Death by Delog Dawa Drolma is a good example of these biographies. *Les Revenants de l'Au-de-là dans le Monde Fibétain*, by Françoise Pommet, is an excellent academic study of the *delog*.

of Trongsa. He does so with a sense of deep foreboding and dies after being surrounded by enemy forces. Ura's version contains wonderful illustrations of key scenes. The more recent work, *The Hero of a Thousand Eyes*, is a biography of Dasho Shingkarlam from Bumthang. It is simultaneously an engrossing personal tale and an insight into Bhutanese life prior to the reforms of the third king. HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo has written a fascinating biography of her father and his family, *Of Rainbows and Clouds*. In 2006 she published *Treasures of the Thunder Dragon*, a personal view of Bhutan and reflection on the changes during Her Majesty's lifetime.

Rinzin Rinzin, a young Bhutanese writer from Lhuentse, has published *The Talisman of Good Fortune and Other Stories from Rural Bhutan*, a collection of nine short stories that give the reader a sense of rural life. There is an interesting mix of stories and poems by Tshering C Dorji in *Shadow around the Lamp*.

Cinema

Film-making is relatively new to Bhutan. The first feature film produced by a Bhutanese film-maker for a non-Bhutanese audience was *The Cup* by Khyentse Norbu, which was nominated as best foreign-language film for the 2000 Academy Awards. *Travellers and Magicians* (2003), also produced by Khyentse Norbu, is the first Dzongkha-language film to be made for an international audience. The film contains two parallel tales and its main theme is very pertinent to contemporary Bhutan. The main story focuses on a young frustrated civil servant, Dhundup, who dreams of leaving Bhutan for the United States. He likes rock'n'roll and western clothes. Yet on the road to the capital, he encounters a series of people who suggest that contentment can be found among his own people.

Bhutanese of all ages enjoy these films, and part of the enjoyment for many is identifying friends and relatives, as well as the locations. Bhutanese films such as *Khorwa*, made for a Bhutanese audience, often tackle contemporary social problems such as domestic violence, the issues facing stepchildren, alcoholism and more recently, unemployment. Presently, the production values and acting are of varying quality, yet a stronger sense of Bhutanese film-making is gradually appearing, with annual awards recognising local film-makers. One recent film, *Muti Thrishing*, swept the prizes for best actor (Tshering Gyaltsen), actress (Sonam Choki), film, director (Pelden Dorji) and script at the Fifth National Film awards in Thimphu 2006.

Music

The music scene in Thimphu is small; popular music, *rigsar*, is still evolving. *Rigsar* is typically performed on modern instruments, notably electric piano and synthesiser. *Rigsar* blends elements of traditional Bhutanese and Tibetan tunes, and is influenced by Hindi film music.

Popular male and female performers are emerging. Lhamo, Dechen Pem and Rinchen Namgay often appear in locally produced films. There is a range of music now available from little booths (notably on Norzin Lam near the traffic island) in Thimphu and throughout Bhutan. New tapes appear regularly and may be music from a Bhutanese film. Cassettes are not expensive (Nu 60 to 80).

In addition to *rigsar* performers, there are various performers who specialise in folk or religious songs, like Am Thinlay. Jigme Drukpa (*Folk Songs from Bhutan*) performs a wide selection of the two main styles of folk singing: *zhungdra*, which developed in Bhutan in the seventeenth century and *boedra*, influenced by Tibetan folk music.

There are four main traditional instruments in Bhutan, beyond the ritual instruments used in religious ceremonies: the ornate *draymen* or Bhutanese

The world's largest book, entitled *Bhutan: a Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Kingdom*, weighs 59kg

The website <http://www.bhutan.ethno-museum.ac.at> is an excellent online source of information about Bhutanese culture.

lute, the *pchewang*, with has only two strings, *lyem* (bamboo flute) and the *yangchen*, made from hollow wood, with 72 strings which are struck lightly with two thin bamboo sticks.

There is a series of four CDs from the Monasteries of Bhutan, with the misleading title *Tibetan Buddhist Rites* (John Levy, Lyrichord). This collection includes a wide range of sacred and folk music, including a hauntingly beautiful recording of a *manip* (an itinerant ascetic) reciting a song recollecting the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's arrival in Bhutan.

Theatre and Dance

The main form of dance is the *cham*, performed at the tshechus and other festivals held throughout Bhutan. Usually the tshechus are performed in the dzong courtyards. The tshechu is a social event, drawing people from the surrounding districts, and it's also an opportunity to be immersed in Buddhist teachings. The Bhutanese believe that they will create merit by attending the tshechus and watching the performances of ritual dances. Tshechus are not solemn occasions, but are marked by a holiday atmosphere as people put on their finest clothing and jewellery, share their food and exchange news with friends and relatives.

The tshechus are based on a series of dances performed in honour of Guru Rinpoche. The dates and duration of the tshechus vary from one district to another and always take place on or around the 10th day of the Bhutanese calendar, which is dedicated to Guru Rinpoche.

There are three broad categories of dance; the main dances performed are described here.

PACHAM (DANCE OF THE HEROES)

An energetic dance based on a vision by Pema Lingpa and is believed to lead believers directly to the presence of Guru Rinpoche.

SHAWA SHACHI (DANCE OF THE STAG AND HUNTER)

Based on the story of Milarepa's conversion of the hunter Gonpo Dorji to Buddhism, the dance is split into two parts. The first part is comic, with the hunter preparing to set out on a hunting expedition and his servants joking very irreverently with him. The second part is more serious. The hunter and his dog are in pursuit of a deer when the deer seeks shelter with the yogi Milarepa. Milarepa, identifiable by his white cotton robe, sings a song that converts all three to Buddhism. The conversion is symbolised by a rope that both the dog and hunter must jump over.

DRANYEO CHAM (DANCE WITH THE DRANYEN)

This dance celebrates the diffusion of the Drukpa lineage in Bhutan by the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The dancers carry swords and wear a circular headdress, felt boots and heavy woollen clothes. One dancer carries a *dranyen*, a string instrument similar to a guitar.

SHA NA CHAM (BLACK HAT DANCE)

This dance, on one level, commemorates the killing of the anti-Buddhist Tibetan king, Langdarma in 842 by the Buddhist monk, Pelkyi Dorji. It also represents the transformation of the dancers into powerful tantric yogis, who take possession of the dancing area and drive out all evil spirits as they stamp the ground.

PHOLAY MOLAY (DANCE OF THE NOBLEMEN AND LADIES)

This is less a dance than a crude play about the two princesses left with an old couple by two princes who leave for war. The two princesses and an old

woman are corrupted by some *atsaras* (clowns). On their return, the princes are furious and punish the women by cutting off their noses. Eventually, everybody is reconciled and the princes marry the princesses.

DRAMETSI NGA CHAM (DANCE OF THE DRAMETSI DRUMMERS)

Based on a vision by Kunga Gyeltshen, the son of Pema Lingpa, this dance depicts 100 peaceful and wrathful deities. The dancers wear animal masks and knee-length yellow skirts, and carry a large hand drum in their left hand and a drumstick in their right.

DUNG TAM (DANCE OF THE WRATHFUL DEITIES)

In this dance, the deities are the entourage of one of the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, Dorji Drolu. Dorji Drolu and his entourage are armed with *phurba* (special daggers) which execute and thereby redeem an evil spirit (represented by a small mannequin). This represents Buddhist teachings on the liberation of consciousness from the body.

RAKSHA MANGCHAM (DANCE OF THE RAKSHAS AND THE JUDGEMENT OF THE DEAD)

This is one of the highlights of the tshechu. It represents a spiritual drama as two newly deceased men are brought before the Lord of the Underworld, represented by a large mannequin surrounded by an entourage of *raksha* (a figure or spirit of the underworld). The first to be judged is a sinner, dressed in black. After hearing from Black Demon and White God, the prosecution and defence, his sins outweigh his good actions and he is dragged to the hell realms. The second figure is dressed in white; again the Lord of the Underworld hears about his good and bad actions, and he is found to be virtuous. After a brief attempt by Black Demon to grab the virtuous man, he is led to the pure lands.

GURU TSHENGAY (THE EIGHT MANIFESTATIONS OF GURU RINPOCHE)

The eight manifestations are different forms of Guru Rinpoche, who is accompanied by his two consorts, Yeshe Tshogyal (on his right) and Mandarava (on his left). This is both a dance and a drama and starts with Dorji Drolu entering the dance area, followed by a long procession with the eight manifestations. For more on the eight manifestations, see p26.

CHHOESHEY (RELIGIOUS SONG)

This commemorates the opening of the eastern gate to the pilgrimage site at Tsari in Tibet by Tsangpa Gyarey, the founder of the Drukpa Kagyu.

Folk dances are performed in schools, villages and households, as well as by professional dancers during breaks in the tshechu performance. The dancers form a circle or a line and move in an intricate series of steps accompanied by graceful arm movements. One person may lead the singing, with the other dancers picking up the song or answering with a refrain.

In Thimphu, the Royal Academy for the Performing Arts (RAPA) trains young Bhutanese dancers and musicians in religious and folk dances. The quality of the dancing is exceptional and the program they offer is breathtaking in its colour and vitality.

Until recently there has been no tradition of acting beyond the masked dances and comic skits performed at the festivals, but with the development of modern education, school performances include Shakespeare or locally written plays. These are aired regularly on BBS. Although there was no tradition of writing plays in Bhutan, recently there have been moves to produce plays in Dzongkha. One young playwright, Sonam Kinga, has written several award-winning plays in Dzongkha, loosely based on classical Greek works.

The website www.raonline.ch/pages/bt has examples of Bhutanese music and further information on Bhutanese culture.

Cressida's Bed by Desmond Barry is a fictional account of the murder of the last Zhabdrung at Talo Dzong.

For a blend of traditional and modern music, look out for the beautiful recording of chants by Lama Gyurme and Jean-Philippe Rykiel, *The Lama's Chants – Songs of Awakening* (Sony, 1994) and *Rain of Blessings* (Real World Records, 2000).

Zangtho Pelri (Tashi Nyencha, 2000), available in Bhutan, has a good selection of traditional songs.

Finally, wherever there is dancing you should be willing to take part. Traditionally, everybody, including visitors, enthusiastically takes part in the final dance (*Tashi Lebey*), which concludes all festivities or dance performances. Don't feel shy, just follow the person in front of you and smile!

SPORT

Traditional Games

Bhutan's national sport is archery (*datse*). It is played wherever there is enough space and remains the favourite sport for all ages. There are archery tournaments held throughout the country. In the countryside you will see the traditional wooden bows, while in Thimphu modern imported bows are often now used.

Archery contests act as both an affirmation of Bhutanese cultural identity as well as popular entertainment. The tournaments begin with a short ceremony and breakfast. The targets are placed 140m apart. Players often stand close to the targets and call how good or bad the aim of their opponent is – if the contestant hits the target, his team mates will perform a slow dance and sing his praises, while he slips a coloured scarf into his belt. If he misses, the opposition mock his ability.

Women, usually wearing their finest clothes and jewellery, often stand to one side of the archery field and act as cheerleaders. They dance and sing during breaks from the shooting. Their songs and shouts can be quite ribald!

Monks are forbidden to participate in archery, so they often play a stone-throwing game called *daygo*. A round, flat stone rather like a discus is tossed at a target and the winner is the one that gets the closest.

The Bhutanese version of shot put is called *pungdo*, and is played with large heavy stones.

Khuru is a darts game played on a field about 20m long with small targets similar to those used by archers. The darts are usually homemade from a block of wood and a nail, with some chicken feathers for fins. If a chicken can't be found, bits of plastic make a good substitute. Teams compete with a lot of shouting and arm waving, designed to put the thrower off his aim. The game is a favourite of monks and young boys; beware of dangerous flying objects if you are near a *khuru* target or archery field.

Modern Sports

Bhutan first sent an archery team of three men and three women to participate in the 1984 Olympics. Since then Bhutan has participated in the Olympics and in a series of regional sporting competitions. It earned a gold medal for tae kwon do in the South Asia Federation games in 2004.

Modern sports, notably basketball, football, golf, tae kwon do, shooting and tennis, are rapidly growing in popularity. Basketball is a favourite, especially since the king used to play basketball in public on a regular basis. Football teams such as DrukStar in Thimphu have emerged in the main urban areas, and you may see matches taking place on the playing fields at Changlimithang. Bhutan came to the attention of filmmakers during the 2002 World Cup when they arranged for Bhutan to play against the football team of the small island of Montserrat. The documentary film, *The Other Final* produced by Johan Kramer narrates the events leading up to the football match and the enthusiastic participation of the crowd.

There is a small golf course lying between Trashi Chhoe dzong and the National Library, plus another at India House. Golf competitions are popular among the emerging middle class. Cricket has recently gained popularity despite the current lack of suitable cricket pitches and there are currently 12 cricket clubs in Thimphu alone.

Until the mid-twentieth century there were no large urban settlements in Bhutan. By 2005, the population of Thimphu was over 50,000.

The population growth rate has been reduced from 3.1% in 1994 to 1.3% now.

In the 2005 Census 96% of Bhutanese declared themselves to be happy.

Buddhism in Bhutan

Buddhism is inscribed into the landscape of Bhutan – prayer flags, white-and-red chortens and images of Buddhist saints carved into the rock dot the countryside. To understand Bhutan and its peoples, it is essential to have a basic understanding of Buddhism. Buddhist values are central to Bhutanese daily life. The experience of entering a dzong or monastery, or even a private household shrine room will be enriched by understanding the core Buddhist concepts, and how these are encapsulated in some of the common religious images and practices encountered in Bhutan. The Buddhism of Bhutan has a complex and rich visual tradition that can seem overwhelming. The bright and intricate mandalas decorating temple porches, wrathful protective deities and the Wheel of Life all serve the same purpose: to encapsulate basic Buddhist teachings.

Buddhism is perhaps the most accommodating of the world's religions. As Buddhism has spread, it has adapted to local conditions, creating new schools of thought. However, its basic tenets have remained the same and all schools of Buddhism are united by their faith in the value of the original teachings of Sakyamuni (Sakya Thukpa), the Historical Buddha.

Vestiges of Bon, the pre-Buddhist beliefs of Tibet, can still be found in Bhutan. Moreover, Bhutan has a rich folk religion (*luso*) and Bhutanese folk beliefs are primarily concerned with a range of spirits, like *nep* or local deities who act as the custodian of particular valleys such as Chungdu in Haa, or Radak in Wangdue Phodrang. Other spirits reside in rocks or groves of trees; there are *tshomen*, goddesses who inhabit the lakes; *lu*, or *nagas* – snake-bodied spirits who dwell in the lakes, rivers and wells. *Sadak* are lords of the earth and *tsen* are air spirits who can bring illness and death.

Not all Bhutanese are Buddhist. Many of the Lhotshampas, the descendants of Nepalese migrants, are Hindu – as are the majority of the casual labourers from Assam and Bengal. There are still traces of the earlier pre-Buddhist beliefs in the countryside and a small number of Christian converts. Bhutan is tolerant of all religions but does not permit proselytisation. The draft constitution upholds freedom of belief and does not make any religion the official religion of Bhutan. It does, however, recognise the importance of Bhutan's Buddhist heritage to Bhutan's cultural identity.

HISTORY

Buddhism originated in northern central India around the 6th or 5th century BC, from the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha (at present, some historians consider that he lived in the 6th century and others in the 5th century). When he was born the local religion was based on Brahmanism. Some Brahmins (in order to purify themselves before performing rituals to their gods) would wander in remote areas and engage in ascetic practices – fasting, practising yogic techniques and meditation. The young Siddhartha Gautama, who would become known as the Buddha, was one of many such wandering ascetics. His teachings became the basis for a new religion, Buddhism.

Little is known for certain about the young Siddhartha Gautama. According to legend his parents, King Suddhodana and Queen Maya, lived in a small kingdom, Sakya, which lay on the border between the present-day states of Nepal and India. Shortly after his birth a wandering ascetic prophesied to King Suddhodana that the young prince would either be a world-conquering king or a liberator of living beings from suffering. The King took various precautions to ensure that his son would never have cause to follow a spiritual path. However, the young prince grew restless and during various excursions

'Buddhism is perhaps the most accommodating of the world's religions'

from his palace Siddhartha Gautama saw various examples of suffering that inspired him to escape from his palace life.

After fleeing the palace, Siddhartha became a wandering ascetic, fasting and meditating. Finally at Bodha Gaya in Bihar, India, Siddhartha began meditating beneath a bo (papal) tree, declaring that he would not stop until he had achieved enlightenment. He had realised there must be a middle path between the extremes of his former life in the palace and the ascetic practices he had been taught. As dawn broke on the morning of his third night of meditation Siddhartha became a buddha (an awakened one).

BUDDHIST CONCEPTS

Shortly after gaining enlightenment, the Buddha gave his first public teaching in the Deer Park at Sarnath. For the remainder of his life, the Buddha continued to give teachings and established the early Buddhist monastic community. These early teachings by the Buddha, who is known in Bhutan as Sakyamuni Buddha or Sakya Thukpa, are collected in the sutras and form the basis for all later Buddhist thought. The Mahayana school, which developed later, diverged from these earlier teachings in some respects, but not fundamentally.

The Buddha started his teachings by explaining that there was a middle way that steered a course between sensual indulgence and ascetic self-torment. The Middle Way can be followed by taking the Eight Fold Noble Path, underpinned by the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths set out the laws of cause and effect. These basic concepts are the core of early Buddhist thought. In Bhutan, these are contained in a series of meditations that lamas and religious teachers view as the foundation for spiritual growth leading to enlightenment: the Four Mind Turnings.

Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths underpin Buddhist philosophy and are the basic facts about ignorance and enlightenment, suffering and freedom set forth by the Buddha in his first formal discourse in Sarnath, following his attainment of enlightenment at Bodha Gaya.

The first Noble Truth is that life is suffering, the Truth of Suffering. This suffering is the misery of an unenlightened life and the constant process of rebirth in the different realms of existence. At its root is the inherent imperfection of life – the inability to find true satisfaction in samsara. The suffering of life is inherent in the pain of birth, ageing, sickness and death, in having to associate with the unpleasant things of life and to lose that which brings us pleasure.

The reason for this dissatisfaction and suffering is contained in the Second Noble Truth, True Origins. This refers to our desire for things to be other than they actually are. The Buddha taught that in order to gain liberation from suffering, we need to abandon our delusions and selfish actions which are the cause for our rebirth in samsara. Due to our ignorance, we create the causes for our rebirth and maintain the cycle.

The third Noble Truth was described by the Buddha as True Cessation. True Cessation is the stopping of all delusions, our desires and attachment to samsara. With the cessation of desire and attachment, we are able to break the cycle of rebirth and suffering and reach the state of nirvana, the ultimate goal of Buddhism. The final Noble Truth is the truth of the path leading to cessation.

The doctrine of the Four Noble Truths is the foundation on which the whole path to liberation and enlightenment is built. Therefore a deep understanding of these truths, cultivated through reflection and meditation, is an indispensable basis for following the Buddhist path.

TASHI TAGYE

Many homes and temples are decorated with *tashi tagye*, the eight auspicious signs of Himalayan Buddhism. Each has a deep symbolic meaning and represents an object used in religious observances.

PRAYER FLAGS *Kunzang Dorji*

Prayer flags are ubiquitous in Bhutan, found fluttering on mountain passes, ridges, mountain meadows, rooftops, dzong and temple courtyards and in front of houses.

The prayer flags are in five colours – blue, green, red, yellow and white – symbolising the elements of water, wood, fire, earth and iron, respectively. They also stand for the five *dhyani* or meditation Buddhas; the five wisdoms; the five directions; and the five mental attributes or emotions.

They may all look similar, but prayer flags have several important variations. Some prayer flags are hung from strings near holy places, especially passes, but most traditional Bhutanese prayer flags are mounted on vertical poles. The text for the flag is carved into wooden blocks and then printed on the cloth in repeating patterns. Each of the four varieties of prayer flag has a specific function, but they all serve the same basic purpose – to invoke the blessings and protection from the deities for conscious beings, living or dead.

Goendhar

The smallest prayer flags, *goendhars*, are those mounted on the rooftops of Buddhist homes. These white banners have small blue, green, red and yellow ribbons attached to their edges. They invoke the blessings and patronage of Yeshe Goeipo (Mahakala), the main protective deity of the country, to ensure the family's welfare and prosperity. A purification ceremony is performed and the goendhar is erected once a house has been completed. The flags are replaced annually during a ceremony that honours the family's personal local deities.

Lungdhar

The *lungdhar* (wind flag) is erected on hillsides or ridges and can be for good luck, protection from an illness, the achievement of a personal goal, or the acquisition of wisdom. These flags are printed with the Wind Horse, or Lungta, which carries a wish-fulfilling jewel on its back.

The name and age of the person is printed on the flag along with the text pertaining to the exact need. Astrological charts are used to determine the direction, colour and location of the flag, and a consecration ceremony is performed when it is erected.

Manidhar

The *manidhar* is erected on behalf of a deceased person, and features prayers to the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chenresig. When a family member dies, such flags are commissioned to cleanse the sins of the deceased. The *mani* prayer banner takes its name from the mantra '*om mani peme hum*' ('hail to the jewel in the lotus'), which is the special sacred mantra of Chenresig. These prayer flags are generally erected in batches of 108 and invoke Chenresig's blessing and immeasurable compassion for the deceased.

Both the *lungdhar* and the *manidhar* flags are placed at strategic high points from which a river can be seen. In this way, the belief is that the prayers will waft with the wind to the river, and be carried by the river on its long and winding journey.

Lhadhar

The largest flag in the country is the *lhadhar* (god flag). These huge flags can be seen outside dzongs and other important places and represent victory over the forces of evil. There is normally no text on these flags; they are like a giant version of the *goendhar*. The only difference, apart from size, is at the top, where the *lhadhar* is capped by a colourful silk parasol. You must be formally dressed in traditional Bhutanese attire for Bhutanese and in appropriate dress for foreigners to enter any place where a *lhadhar* stands.

Pole

At the top of the pole is a *redi*, a wood carving of a traditional knife. It is joined to the flagpole by a *khorlo*, a wooden wheel. The *redi* represents the god of wisdom, Jampelyang, and the *khorlo* represents the lotus, which is associated with the birth of Guru Rinpoche.

PRECIOUS UMBRELLA

The *duk* symbolises the activity of preserving beings from illness and negative forces.

Eight-Fold Path

The Fourth Noble Truth, True Paths, set out by the Buddha refers to the correct means through which an individual is able to overcome attachment and desires in the pursuit of liberation from samsara. These are often described as the Eight-Fold Path: with dedication and practice it may lead to accumulation of merit, then enlightenment and liberation. The eight components of the path to enlightenment are: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Karma

As beings are reborn in samsara their rebirths in the different realms of existence are determined by their karma. Rebirth is not haphazard. Karma is often simplified in translation as meaning 'action' (*las*). The Buddha states that 'for every action we perform we experience a similar result'.

Karma in Buddhist doctrine refers to three important components: actions, their effects and their consequences. Actions are divided into those of the body, speech and mind and the main concern is with the imprint of each action on the mind or mental continuum which follows each being from rebirth to rebirth. Buddhist teachings liken karma to a seed (action) which ripens into a fruit (effect).

Merit (*sonam*) refers to the wholesome tendencies imprinted in the mind as a result of positive and skilful thoughts, words and actions that ripen in the experience of happiness and well being. According to ancient texts, the Tibetan king Srongtsen Gampo set out the ten virtuous and non-virtuous actions in order to help guide people to lead virtuous lives. The Ten Virtuous actions (*gewa cu*) are to refrain from: killing, stealing, inappropriate sexual activity, lying, engaging in gossip, cursing, sowing discord, envy, malice and wrong view.

Mahayana teachings say it is important to dedicate the merit of one's wholesome actions to the benefit of all living beings, ensuring that others also experience the results of one's positive actions. Therefore, in Bhutan and elsewhere in the Himalayan region, the accumulation of merit is not a selfish act. Rather, it is dedicated to all living beings with the aspiration that they gain liberation from samsara, demonstrating the belief that through action all beings, as one, affect each other.

Rebirth

In Buddhism, life is a cycle of rebirth, and these rebirths are countless as living beings 'wander' in samsara. There is not just one world but a myriad of worlds in which beings may be reborn – according to Buddhist doctrine there are six different realms of existence. Rebirth, or cyclic existence, emerges from fundamental ignorance through a process known as the twelve links of dependent origination. When this fundamental ignorance is reversed, cyclic existence itself can be reversed and nirvana attained, free from suffering and the processes of rebirth. The six realms of existence and the twelve links of dependent origination are commonly depicted in the Wheel of Life and according to Buddhist teachings it is important during one's lifetime to accumulate enough merit to avoid being reborn in one of the three lower realms. This emphasises the preciousness of a human life and the importance of engaging in virtuous actions.

Impermanence

Along with suffering and the absence of the self, impermanence is regarded in Buddhism as one of the three marks or characteristics of causally conditioned phenomena. Although Buddhist literature mentions various degrees of impermanence, in general it can be defined as the momentarily changing nature of all things. Buddhist teachings say change is dynamic and never

WHITE CONCH

The *dungkar* winds to the right and is a symbol of the deep and melodious sound of the dharma teachings.

ending, reflecting the nature of flux and fluidity in conditioned existence. This fundamental quality of impermanence includes our bodies, the world around us and also our perceiving minds.

Four Mind Turnings

In Bhutan, as in Tibet, the teachings of Buddha are presented with an emphasis on developing a strong faith through reflection, and in exhorting the practitioner to take the teachings to heart. Many lamas and teachers start by setting out the Four Mind Turnings (or Four Preliminaries). These are undertaken by an aspiring Buddhist practitioner of the tantras before they receive instruction on more advanced meditational practices. All lamas and teachers emphasise the importance for the practitioner to carefully test the teachings, not simply to accept them.

SCHOOLS OF BUDDHISM

Shortly after the death of Sakyamuni, disputes began to arise among his disciples over the interpretation of his teachings. The sutras were composed after his death and subsequently different schools of thought appeared, leading to a schism and the emergence of the two principal schools of Buddhism, Hinayana and Mahayana.

Hinayana, sometimes known as Theravada, focused on pursuing liberation for the individual. Mahayana took Buddhism in a different direction, emphasising compassion and the liberation of all living beings. The Hinayana teachings retreated to southern India before becoming established in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma and Cambodia. The Mahayana teachings were developed in the new Buddhist universities in northern India before being transmitted northwards through the Himalayas, to China, Japan and Korea.

Mahayana

The Mahayana school emerged in the 1st and 2nd centuries. It teaches that the bodhisattva ('hero of enlightenment') seeks enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, out of heartfelt compassion and self-sacrifice, rather than seeking liberation from samsara for her or himself. This altruistic attitude is referred to as *bodhicitta*, or mind of enlightenment, and involves cultivating love and great compassion towards others through the practice of the six perfections: generosity, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentrations and wisdom.

The Mahayana teachings on compassion permeate the religious beliefs and practices of the Bhutanese.

Tantrism (Vajrayana)

A new school emerged from the Mahayana in about AD 600. Both the Hinayana and Mahayana schools studied the sutras that recorded the teachings of Sakyamuni; however, the followers of Tantrism believed that he had left a collection of esoteric teachings to a select few of his early disciples. These were known as Tantra (*gyu*).

Tantra (Sanskrit meaning 'continuum') has two meanings in Buddhism. It refers to the literature dealing with tantric teachings and secondly to the continuum of development from ignorance to enlightenment. Tantra involves identifying with a tutelary deity through deep meditation and the recitation of mantra. The two most well known mantras are *om mani padme hum* of Chenresig (Avalokiteshvara) and *om vajra guru padme siddhi hum* of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava).

In Bhutan many of the ritual objects and the imagery in the monasteries and temples are derived from tantric teachings. They display the many different aspects of enlightenment – at times gentle as in the image of Chenresig

GOLDEN FISH

The *sernga* represents the auspiciousness of all beings in a state of fearlessness without drowning in the ocean of suffering.

VASE OF TREASURE

The *bumpa* represents long life, wealth and prosperity.

VICTORY BANNER

The *gyeltshen* represents the victory of the Buddhist doctrine over harmful forces.

or the Medicine Buddha, at times wrathful as in the image of Dorje Drolo. The meditational deities sit at the centre of an elaborate mandala, a representation of the pure land where the deity resides. Through years of careful meditation the tantric practitioner identifies with the deity by visualising in detail the three-dimensional mandala.

BUDDHISM IN BHUTAN
Arrival of Buddhism in Bhutan

The introduction of Buddhism occurred in the seventh century, when Tibetan king Srongtsen Gampo (r 627–49), a convert to Buddhism, ordered the construction of two Buddhist temples, at Bumthang in central Bhutan and at Kyichu in the Paro valley. Buddhism replaced, but did not eliminate, the Bon practices that were also prevalent in Tibet until the late 6th century. Instead, Buddhism absorbed Bon and its believers. As the country developed in its many fertile valleys, Buddhism matured and became a unifying element. It was Buddhist literature and chronicles that began the recorded history of Bhutan.

In AD 746, Guru Rinpoche came to Bhutan from India at the invitation of one of the numerous local kings. After reportedly subduing eight classes of demons and converting the king, Guru Rinpoche moved on to Tibet. Upon his return from Tibet, he oversaw the construction of new monasteries in the Paro valley and set up his headquarters in Bumthang. According to tradition, he founded the Nyingmapa sect – also known as the old ‘red hat’ sect – of Mahayana Buddhism, which became for a time the dominant religion of Bhutan. Guru Rinpoche plays a great historical and religious role as the national patron saint; for more on his influence and history, see p26. Following the guru’s sojourn, Indian influence played a temporary role until increasing Tibetan migrations brought new cultural and religious contributions.

By the 10th century, Bhutan’s political development was heavily influenced by its religious history. Following a period in which Buddhism was in decline in Tibet, contention among a number of subsects emerged. Among these monks was the founder of the Lhapa subsect of the Kargyupa school, to whom is attributed the introduction of the strategically built dzong. Although the Lhapa subsect had been successfully challenged in the 12th century by another Kargyupa subsect (the Drukpa), led by Tibetan monk Phajo Drugom Shigpo, it continued to proselytise until the 17th century. The Drukpa teachings spread throughout western Bhutan and eventually became a dominant form of religious practice. In central and eastern Bhutan the older form of Nyingmapa Buddhism was predominate during this period. The three main schools of Himalayan Buddhism who spread Buddhist teachings in Bhutan were the Nyingmapa, the Kagyupa and the Sakyapa. A fourth school, the Gelugpa, emerged in Tibet in the fifteenth century. This school had no impact on the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan and was viewed by the Bhutanese from the 17th century onwards as hostile to Bhutan.

NYINGMAPA

Nyingmapa is the oldest school of Himalayan Buddhism. The distinction between the old and new schools of Tibetan Buddhism is made on the basis of the break that followed the persecution of Buddhism during the 9th century in Tibet by King Langdarma and preceded the second or later phase of Buddhist propagation when a further corpus of Buddhist literature was introduced from India by Marpa, Atisa and Rinchen Zangpo during the eleventh century. The religious lineages derived from the earlier phase and works translated before the interregnum are known as Nyingma or the Ancient Translation school, while those that emerged thereafter are known as the New Translation school (Sarma).

ENDLESS KNOT

The noose of eternity, *pelgiibeu*, represents the mind and the union of wisdom and compassion.

The Nyingma school did not develop as a strong centralised school following the revival of Buddhism in Tibet. However, the Nyingma did experience a revival through the discovery of *terma* or hidden texts believed to have been buried by Guru Rinpoche in various sacred sites throughout Tibet and Bhutan. These hidden texts were found in the earth or under water as in the case of Pema Linga the great Bhutanese treasure finder (*terton*), or they might arise in the mind of the yogi. Religious texts were not the only items discovered by *tertons* – ritual implements and figures of Guru Rinpoche were also discovered.

KAGYUPA

The Drukpa Kagyu lineage was established by Tsangpa Gyarey at Ralung Monastery in central Tibet, and was brought to Bhutan by Phajo Drugom Shigpo. The lineage stems from the great accomplished masters Tilopa, Naropa and Maitripa through to Marpa the Translator, who formed the Dagpo Kagyu lineage. Of importance for Bhutan is the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. All of these traditions integrate practise derived from sutras and the tantras.

The great yogi Milarepa (1040–1123) was the disciple of Marpa the Translator (1012–93) and his spiritual songs remain very popular today. The influence of Milarepa’s own disciple, Gampopa (1079–1153) led to the establishment of monasteries that developed into major teachings centres. Eventually, these monasteries overshadowed the ascetic yogi origins of the Kagyupa, although the yogic tradition did continue. Kagyu religious practices emphasise solitary meditation in the Milarepa style, combined with vajrayana practices.

SAKYAPA

One of the four principal schools of Tibetan Buddhism, named after Samye monastery in western Tibet founded by Khon Konchok Gyalpo in the 11th century at a site that has a slightly whitish rock surface. Sakya literally means ‘pale earth’. The widespread influence of the early Sakya masters soon evolved into a whole new school of Tibetan Buddhism, the school reaching its full maturity in particular through the influence of Sakya Pandita. Sakya Pandita’s renown as a Buddhist scholar led him, and subsequent abbots, to be recognised as a manifestation of Manjushri (the bodhisattva of wisdom and learning). During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Sakya school became involved in the politics of Tibet. The essence of the Sakya school’s thought and practice is enshrined in the set of instructions called ‘the path and the fruit’, which presents the entire Mahayana path together with a collection of meditative practices focused on the tantric tutelary deity, Hevajra.

Development of Buddhism in Bhutan

The first record of Buddhism in Bhutan is marked by the building of Buddhist temples by the Tibetan king, Songsten Gampo, in the 7th century at Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro and Jampe Lhakhang, Bumthang. The arrival of Guru Rinpoche is viewed as defining the real introduction of Buddhism. According to Bhutanese tradition, Guru Rinpoche arrived in Bhutan en route to Tibet and subdued local gods and demons, as well as saving the life of a local king of Bumthang, Sendha Gyab (sometimes referred to as Sindhu Raja) from a local spirit that had taken his life essence, thereby leading the king to convert to Buddhism. For more on Guru Rinpoche, see p26.

From the 11th century, with the second diffusion of Buddhism in the region, different religious schools appeared in Tibet and viewed the lands of Bhutan as areas suitable for conversion. Gradually, especially in western Bhutan, the Drukpa Kagyupa school steadily increased its influence.

LOTUS FLOWER

The *pema* is a symbol of the purification of the body, speech and mind.

GOLDEN WHEEL

The *khorlo* is the precious wheel of the Buddha’s doctrine.

Phajo Drukpa

Phajo Drugom Zhigpo was born in Kham, eastern Tibet, in about 1184. He received religious instruction from the nephew of Tsangpa Gyarey and set out for Bhutan in 1222.

After staying in Lingzhi, Phajo meditated at Paro Taktshang where he had a vision of Guru Rinpoche. In a later vision, Phajo learned that he would meet his spiritual consort in Wang. Arriving in Wang, he saw Sonam Peldon with a group of girls and sang to them. She replied and they met each other at the Lungten Zampa bridge (this bridge was located near the one that lies on the modern approach to Thimphu). There is a cave below a chorten underneath the bridge which is said to be where Phajo and Sonam stayed. After settling at Dodeyna, near Tango Goemba, he and Sonam had a daughter and seven sons. One day when Sonam and her daughter were gathering food, Phajo took his seven small sons to a bridge over a fast-flowing river and prayed to the deities to show him the way forward for him and his family. Then he threw the seven infants into the river in the belief that those who survived would help him promote the Drukpa teachings and those that died were demons. Sonam, on returning, was furious. Learning that four sons had been swept off in four different directions, she ran to find them and bring them back to Dodeyna. These four surviving sons were to play a significant role in the promotion of the Druk Kagyu teachings in western Bhutan.

At the same time as Phajo's arrival in western Bhutan, a large part of that region was under the influence of the Lhasas. The Lhasas were the followers of the Lhapa Kagyu, another sect from Tibet. They viewed Phajo with deep suspicion and attempted to remove him and his family from the area. Over time, local people came to lose faith in the Lhapa and Phajo's spiritual authority increased steadily.

After Phajo's death in 1251 his descendants maintained close ties with the Gya clan, the ruling family of Ralung (the seat of the Drukpa Kagyu in Tibet). Between the 14th and 16th century, several important Druk Kagyu teachers were invited to preach and establish monasteries in western Bhutan. Perhaps the most famous Druk Kagyu teacher was the colourful and unconventional Drukpa Kunley (1455–1529; p136). He is remembered today with immense affection and faith by the Bhutanese and is closely associated with the beautiful temple of Chimi Lhakhang between Lobesa and Punakha. The annual festival held there is attended by couples wanting to conceive a child, and men visit the temple to receive blessings from Drukpa Kunley.

In central and eastern Bhutan, the Nyingma school was the main presence. In the 14th century, the great Buddhist scholar and teacher Longchen Rabjam spent about 10 years in exile from Tibet in Bumthang and Kurtoe. During this time, Longchen Rabjam established three important monasteries at Tharpaling, Ugyencholing and Kunzangling in Kurtoe. Through his efforts, the Nyingma tradition was strengthened in central and eastern Bhutan.

Probably the most famous Bhutanese religious figure is Pema Lingpa (1450–1521; p175). He is referred to as a *terton* or treasure finder for he located *terma* (treasure) hidden by Guru Rinpoche many centuries earlier. The treasures were spiritual treasures – texts and dharma objects that Pema Lingpa used in his teachings.

As well as giving religious teachings and discovering spiritual treasures, Pema Lingpa composed religious texts and sacred dances, and sponsored temple building and decoration. His descendents, like the descendants of Phajo, were to spread to various parts of Bhutan and formed the noble families of the country.

'They viewed Phajo with deep suspicion and attempted to remove him and his family from the area'

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

The arrival in 1616 of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal marks the transformation of Bhutan and the ascendancy of the Druk Kagyu sect. Born in Tibet in 1594, the Zhabdrung belonged to the Gya family who effectively ruled the Druk Kagyu school at Ralung. His grandfather, Mipham Chogyal ruled as the seventeenth abbot of Ralung monastery and from an early age Ngawang Namgyal was trained to succeed his grandfather.

When Mipham Chosgyal died in 1606, the Zhabdrung became the eighteenth abbot at the age of 12. However, his ascension as abbot was not uncontested and was complicated by the fact that he was also recognised as the reincarnation of a famous Druk Kagyu scholar, Pema Karpo. The son of a Tibetan prince, Pagsam Wangpo came forward claiming to be the reincarnation of Pema Karpo. The dispute escalated and the ruler of Tsang was asked to recognise the Zhabdrung as the true reincarnation. Unfortunately, the rule of Tsang supported the other claimant. Returning from an unsuccessful attempt to resolve matters the Zhabdrung and his followers quarrelled with some supporters of the Tsang ruler. Some of them died when their yak-skin boat capsized. A court case was raised against the Zhabdrung and he was ordered to return the Rangjung Karsapani, a relic from Ralung. The Zhabdrung refused, since the return of the relic would mean that the other claimant would be recognised as the reincarnation of Pema Karpo.

The Zhabdrung dreamt of the two protective deities, Mahakala and Palden Lhamo, who presented him with the land of Bhutan. A latter dream showed a raven, associated with Mahakala, flying south towards Bhutan. He then received an invitation from a Druk lama in Gasu to go to Bhutan. According to his biographer, the Zhabdrung intended to create a religious state based on the religious laws encapsulated in the concept of the Dual System – the balance of religious and secular laws. The Zhabdrung left Ralung in 1616 and took the Rangjung Karsapani with him. At first he stayed in Gasu and then moved on to the upper Thimphu valley where he stayed at Pangri Zampa lhakhang.

The flight of the Zhabdrung to Bhutan did not end his problems with his rivals. In 1617 the Tsang Desi sent a Tibetan army into Bhutan and it was defeated in Paro. The Zhabdrung then visited Tango Goemba, where he was welcomed by the grandson of Drukpa Kuenley, Tshewang Tenzin, who offered the monastery and its lands to the Zhabdrung. Here the Zhabdrung meditated in a cave and performed various rituals to overcome his enemies. He also composed the famous Sixteen P's, a poem which sets out his powers and is inscribed in his seal. A copy of the seal can be seen in the National Museum, Paro.

Although he had defeated the Tsang Desi, other religious groups viewed his arrival in Bhutan with unease. These groups, known in Bhutan as the Five Groups of Lamas, attacked the Zhabdrung when he was constructing Simtokha dzong in 1629. The leader was killed but the threat was not crushed. The lamas sought Tibetan assistance and in 1634 the Tibetans invaded again and were once more defeated. A third invasion occurred in 1639 and after their defeat, the Tibetans recognised the authority of the Zhabdrung over Bhutan. There were later, unsuccessful attacks by the Tibetan and Mongol forces. Henceforth the Zhabdrung set about consolidating his power and extending the control of the new Druk Kagyu state throughout Bhutan.

The Zhabdrung's vision for his new state combined the promotion of the Druk Kagyu teachings with a particular vision of how to administer the state. Religion and secular administration were closely intertwined in the new Drukpa state. At the pinnacle of the new structure was the Zhabdrung. Below him he created the Je Khenpo, or chief abbot, who was responsible for all religious matters. His secular counterpart was the *desi*, who was responsible for all political matters.

'The Zhabdrung dreamt of the two protective deities, Mahakala and Palden Lhamo, who presented him with the land of Bhutan'

PROTECTIVE DEITIES

Buddhism has numerous important deities and protectors of the faith, but there are also many other deities that have special significance only within a certain region. These local protector or guardian deities, as well as *yidam* (tutelary deities), may be wrathful manifestations of enlightened beings, spirits or malevolent beings that were subdued and converted by tantric forces. They are an important element of Bhutan's spiritual beliefs and they occupy a special place in lhakhangs. A locally crafted statue, which is often terrifying or wrathful, of a protective deity is found in a corner or in the *goenkhang* of most of Bhutan's lhakhangs.

The deity Mahakala assisted Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal all his life and is recognised as the guardian deity of Bhutan. He is also known as Yeshe Goenpo, is often described as the overlord of all the mountain gods and is a Tantric Buddhist form of the Hindu god Shiva. Mahakali (Wisdom Defender) is the female form, also known as Palden Lhamo (Great Black One), the dark-blue protector.

Most of Bhutan's valleys have a local protective deity. Statues of Thimphu's protector, Gyenyen Jagpa Melen, appear in Dechenphug Lhakhang near Dechenchoeling and in Ney Khang Lhakhang next to the dzong. He is also seen as a national protective deity, with Bhutanese visiting his temple to seek his blessings before a new venture or if leaving the country for any length of time. Among the other regional protective deities are Jichu Drakey in Paro, Chhundu in Haa, Talo Gyalpo Pehar in Punakha, Kaytshugpa in Wangdue Phodrang and, in Bumthang, Keybu Lungtsan and Jowo Ludud Drakpa Gyeltshen. These deities are gods who have not left the world and therefore have not gained enlightenment. For more on protective deities, see p76.

Organisation of the Religious Community

The *dratshang* (central monk body) refers to the government-supported monks who are under the authority of the Je Khenpo. He is assisted by five *lonpons* (masters), each in charge of religious tradition, liturgy, lexicography, or logic. The Je Khenpo moves between Punakha dzong in winter and Thimphu dzong in summer. On these occasions the roads are lined with Bhutanese seeking his blessings and the journey by road takes two days.

Each dzong has a *lam neten*, who is responsible for the monk body in the each *dzongkhag*. Each dzong will have a master of grammar, master of liturgy, master of philosophy, an *umdze* (choirmaster) and a *kundun* (disciple master), who carries a rosary of large beads and a whip.

Traditionally, Bhutanese families would, if they were able, send one son to join a monastery. This was viewed as creating merit for the family and household and a blessing for the child. The fourth *desi*, Tenzin Rabgye, introduced a monk tax in the late 16th century. The reason for this tax, which required one child to be sent to become a monk, was to promote the Drukpa Kagyu sect. *The Songs of Sorrow* by Gelong Sumdar Tashi, dating from the late 18th century, describe how he had to leave his family, including his young wife and son, to become a monk.

There is no longer a monk tax, and young boys continue to enter the monasteries. Any visitor to Bhutan will see long snakes of maroon-robed boy monks walking near the dzongs in Paro and Punakha. Often they come from poor rural families and may or may not have expressed an interest to become a monk. Once in the monastery, their daily lives revolve around learning to read and write.

Typically, the young monks will sit in class with a monk-teacher in the mornings and in the afternoon sit with friends in small groups, reciting their texts. Throughout a monk's education there is an emphasis on memorisation. So each day the monk will memorise a set amount of text and prayers, and will be tested by his teacher. When they are still young the monks do not understand the meaning of the texts. Once they are in the mid-teens they will be examined

individually and they will either proceed to the *shedra* (philosophy school) or perhaps join the ritual school. The *shedra* develops the young monk's knowledge and understanding of a range of Buddhist texts and teachings, while the ritual college trains the monk in the correct procedures for a wide range of rituals. Some monks may be trained as painters or sculptors, or as tailors and embroiderers for the various items required for the monastery.

While the government currently provides basic needs (accommodation, food and clothing), the monks are permitted to keep money received from lay people for performing rituals. They may be requested to attend the blessing of a new house, the consecration of a new chorten or to conduct prayers for the well-being of the household. These events take a great deal of preparation for the sponsor, who will need to ensure that all the necessary ritual items are available. The sponsor will provide food to the monks and often the household will be filled with neighbours attending the ceremony. These events renew and strengthen the bonds between the lay and religious community. The monastic life itself revolves around the performance of rituals in the dzongs and monasteries. Additionally, the monks are busy studying and memorising religious texts and practising skills.

Monks continually take vows, as they progress from novice to fully ordained monk. They are celibate and must abstain from smoking and drinking alcohol, but they are not required to be vegetarian and may eat in the evening, unlike their counterparts in Southeast Asia.

A few monks join monastic orders after adolescence, but they are not the norm. Monks may renounce or return their vows at any time in order to return to lay life, often to start a family, and have to pay a token fine. These former monks are called *getre* or 'retired' monks and there is no social stigma attached to this choice. Some may even act as lay religious figures, called *gomchen*, and perform prayers and ceremonies for a range of daily activities, especially if there is no monastery nearby.

Domestic Rituals

Every house has a *choesham* (altar or shrine room). Each altar usually features statues of Sakyamuni, Guru Rinpoche and the Zhabdrung. In most homes and temples, devotees place seven bowls filled with water on altars. This simple offering is important because it can be given without greed or attachment. If offerings are made to the protective deities, such as Mahakala, then there are only five offering bowls. As all Himalayan Buddhists do, Bhutanese devotees prostrate themselves in front of altars and lamas, first clasping hands above the head, again at throat level and then at the chest. This represents the ultimate desire to attain the body, speech and mind of a buddha.

On special occasions monks prepare *torma* (ritual cake), white and pink sculptures made from *tsampa* (barley flour) and butter, as symbolic offerings to deities. Each deity is associated with a particular form of *torma*.

Rites are performed for events and crises in life such as birth, marriage, promotion, illness and death. The rituals take place in front of the household shrine, or outside with an altar erected with an image of Buddha (representing the Buddha's body), a religious text (representing the Buddha's speech) and a small stupa or chorten (representing the Buddha's mind). The basic rituals of initiation, purification, consecration and the offering of a *torma* are included. For example, a water or incense purification ceremony is performed after a birth, while more elaborate rituals involving the offering of the eight lucky signs (ie Tashi Tagye) may be offered at a promotion or marriage. Astrology maybe used to decide the timing of the rituals. Bhutanese often consult *tsip* (astrologers) before embarking on a journey or a new undertaking. Astrology

'The monastic life itself revolves around the performance of rituals in the dzongs and monasteries'

plays an important role in overcoming misfortune and deciding the most appropriate time to perform rituals to avert misfortune.

Each ritual, irrespective of its purpose, will include prayers for the lineage gurus and the Buddhas, taking refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), a short verse to generate compassion for all living beings (cultivating *bodhicitta*), invocation of the deity, offering of *torma*, meditation on the deity with recitation of the appropriate mantra, closing prayers with dedication of merit and apologies for any shortcomings in the ritual or its recitation. Ordinary men and women do not typically engage in meditation or Buddhist philosophical studies, though many will attempt to complete the preliminary practices and will seek the blessings of lamas before embarking on new ventures, for their children and prosperity.

LUSO (FOLK RELIGION)

The invocation of local and protective deities, and the offering of incense to the mountain deities, are everyday rituals in Bhutan. Every locality, mountain, lake, river or grove of trees has its deities and they are worshipped by the local communities. In the morning, leaves or aromatic herbs (juniper) are burned as an offering to the mountain deities. On certain days, a single flag is raised on every house and particular deities are invoked. Many of the local deities are believed to have originally been Bon deities converted to Buddhism by Guru Rinpoche. Bon traditions and rituals are still practised in parts of Bhutan during the celebration of local festivals. Bon may have spread to Bhutan from Tibet prior to the arrival of Guru Rinpoche.

Each locality has its own local practices and often women play a major role in these local ceremonies and celebrations. An interesting, if rare, category of female religious figures is the *delog*. *Delog* are women, occasionally men, who have died and travelled to the other side, where they have watched the judgment of the dead and encountered various buddhas (eg Chenresig or Guru Rinpoche), before returning to life. The *delogs* stress the importance of leading virtuous lives and refraining from causing harm to living beings. The anthropologist Françoise Pommaret encountered several *delog* in eastern Bhutan during the 1980s and the biographies of historical *delog* remain popular in Bhutan.

OTHER FAITHS

The minority religion of Bhutan is Hinduism, whose adherents – those of Nepalese origin – officially constitute 28% of the population. Although Buddhism has played a central role in the history of Bhutan it has not been made the official state religion and Hindus have de facto freedom of religion. The Druk Gyalpo decreed Dasain as a national holiday, and the royal family participate in its celebration. As the draft constitution stresses, all Bhutanese have freedom of religion and foreign religious personnel are permitted to work in Bhutan, primarily as educators, but are not allowed to proselytise.

DZOE – SPIRIT CATCHER

Sometimes you will come across a strange construction of twigs, straw and rainbow-coloured thread woven into a spider-web shape. You may see one near a building or by a roadside, with flower and food offerings. This is a *dzoe* (also known as a *tendo*), a sort of spirit catcher used to exorcise something evil that has been pestering a household. The malevolent spirits are drawn to the *dzoe*. After prayers the *dzoe* is cast away, often on a trail or road, to send away the evil spirits it has trapped.

IMPORTANT FIGURES OF BUDDHISM IN BHUTAN

This is a brief guide to the iconography of some of the main figures of Buddhism in Bhutan. The images are divided into Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Protective Deities, and Historical Figures. This guide is neither exhaustive nor scholarly; rather it seeks to enable you to identify the main figures on altars and in the temple murals encountered during your trip. The Bhutanese names are given first with the Sanskrit (where applicable) in parenthesis.

Buddhas

SAKYAMUNI

Sakyamuni is the Historical Buddha (of the present age), whose teachings are the foundation of Bhutanese Buddhism. Typically in Bhutan, as in Tibet, Sakyamuni is represented as seated with his legs crossed in the adamantine (diamond/*vajra*) position on a lotus-flower throne. His hair is bluish black and there is a halo of light around his head. His right hand touches the ground in the 'witness' *mudra* (hand gesture) and his left rests on his lap, usually with a begging bowl in the left palm. His body is marked with 32 signs of enlightenment.



Sakyamuni

OPAGME (AMITABHA)

The Buddha of Infinite Light is one of the five *dhyana* (meditational or cosmic) buddhas and resides in the Blissful Pure Land of the West (Sukhavati). He is closely associated with Tsepame and Chenresig and represents the transformation of lust into wisdom. He is depicted seated cross-legged on a lotus throne, with his hands resting on his lap in meditative pose and holding a begging bowl. His body is red in colour.

DHYANI BUDDHAS

The Dhyani Buddhas are a group of five Transcendent Buddhas and represent five clans: the Vajra, Buddha, Jewel, Lotus and Action clans. Each clan is associated with one of the five wisdoms of the enlightened mind and is headed by a Transcendent Buddha – one of which is Opagme (described above).



Jampa

TSEPAME (AMITAYUS)

The Buddha of Infinite Life is associated with practices connected to longevity. He has a red-coloured body and holds a precious vase, filled with the nectar of immortality.

JAMPA (MAITREYA)

The Future Buddha is said to be residing as a bodhisattva in Tushita heaven until his time to incarnate on earth as a buddha. He is shown seated with his feet on the ground and hands in front of his chest, in the 'turning the wheel' *mudra*.

SANGYE MENLHA

According to Mahayana tradition, Sakyamuni transformed himself into a deep-blue Buddha who emanates healing rays of light and teaches the science of medicine. Buddhism values medicine as a means to alleviate suffering and prolong human life, thereby improving the opportunity to attain enlightenment. Sangye Menlha is seated cross-legged on a lotus throne, deep-blue in colour, with a begging bowl containing three medicinal fruits. He may be surrounded by a group of eight other medicine buddhas.



Chenresig

Bodhisattvas

CHENRESIG (AVALOKITESHVARA)

The bodhisattva of compassion is probably the best-known deity in Bhutanese Buddhism, outside Bhutan. Chenresig appears in a variety of forms. He is

the 'glorious gentle one' – one of the four great bodhisattvas and the special guardian of Bhutanese religion – pictured sitting in a lotus position, with the lower two (of four) arms in a gesture of prayer. He also appears with 11 heads and 1000 arms arranged in a circle.

JAMPELYANG (MANJUSHRI)

The 'princely lord of wisdom' – the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge – carries a sword in his right hand to destroy the darkness of ignorance. He is the patron of learning and the arts.

CHANA DORJE (VAJRAPANI)

'Thunderbolt in hand' – the god of power and victory – whose thunderbolt represents power and is a fundamental symbol of Tantric faith; it is called a *dorji* in Tibetan and *vajra* in Sanskrit. He is pictured in a wrathful form with an angry face and one leg outstretched.

DROLMA (TARA)

There are many different emanations of Drolma, and a popular prayer recited daily mentions 21 different activities that she performs to protect people and to enable them to gain enlightenment. The two most common representations are as Drolma, a green, female bodhisattva seated on a lotus flower with her right leg extended, ready to leap down to assist. Green Tara is said to have been born from Chenresig's tears of compassion and from her determination to achieve enlightenment in the body of a woman. She is a dynamic bodhisattva. Popularly seen as a saviour, she represents the miraculous activities of all the buddhas. The other form, known as Drolkar (White Tara), is seated in the full lotus posture and with seven eyes, including one in her forehead and two on her palms and soles of her feet.

Protective Deities

CHOKYONG (LOKAPALAS)

Nagpo Chenpo (Mahakala)

Mahakala appears in a variety of forms in Bhutan and is one of the fiercest protective deities. Most Bhutanese monasteries and temples have a shrine dedicated to him (*goenkhang*; not open to women). Mahakala may be invoked to help remove obstacles to a new undertaking, or in times of danger. His worship in Bhutan was popularised by the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, whose personal protective deity he was. According to legend, Mahakala appeared to the Zhabdrung in his raven form (Gompo Jarodanden) and advised him to go to Bhutan. The Raven Headed Mahakala is the basis for the Raven Crown worn by the Bhutanese monarchs.

Mahakala is black with reddish hair which rises upwards. He has three eyes and is surrounded by fire and smoke. He wears various bone ornaments and a skull garland. He carries a curved *vajra* knife in his right hand and a skull cup in his left. Depending on the form depicted he may have two, four, six or more arms.

Palden Lhamo (Mahakali)

The Glorious Goddess is a fierce protective deity and is closely associated with Yeshe Gampo. She is an important protector of the Kagyu order and is equally important to the other sects of Nyingma, Sakya and Gelugpa (in Tibet). Palden Lhamo is invoked in times of difficulty and special pujas are performed to avert misfortune, like natural disasters and wars. She has a ferocious appearance and is quite distinctive. Her body is dark blue, while the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet are red. She wears a crown



Jampeyang



Chana Dorje



Drolkar



Green Tara

of five skulls and her long hair rises upwards. She carries a skull cup in her left hand and brandishes a club in her right. She rides on a wild ass and her saddle cloth is a flayed human skin.

Historical Figures

GURU RINPOCHE (PADMASAMBHAVA)

'The Lotus Born', is an Indian Buddhist Great Adept who, according to Bhutanese tradition, arrived in Bhutan before he went to Tibet in the eighth century. Popularly known as Guru Rinpoche, he is viewed as the Second Buddha by the Nyingma sect. He is depicted seated in a half-lotus position on a lotus throne, wearing a red five-pointed hat with vulture feathers at the top. He wears a blue inner robe with a golden robe and an outer red cloak. He has long flowing hair and a curly moustache. In his extended right hand he holds a *vajra* and in his left hand, resting on his lap, is a skull cup filled with nectar. A staff topped with a freshly severed head, a decaying head and a skull rests in the crook of his left arm. A ritual dagger, for subduing demons, is tucked into his belt. He may be accompanied by his two female disciples, Yeshe Tshogyal and Mandarava, one on either side. Guru Rinpoche also appears in eight manifestations (see p26).

MILAREPA

A great Tibetan magician (1040–1123) and poet of the Kagyu lineage, he is believed to have attained the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood in the course of one life. He travelled extensively throughout the Himalayan border lands and is said to have meditated at Taktshang in Bhutan, where he composed a song. Most images of Milarepa picture him smiling and holding his hand to his ear as he sings.

DRUKPA KUNLEY

The wandering ascetic, Drukpa Kunley (1455–1529), is one of the main figures of the Druk Kagyu. His ribald songs and poems were unconventional and have earned him the affection of the Bhutanese. In Bhutan he is often depicted with a bow-and-arrow case and accompanied by a small hunting dog. In Chimi Lhakhang, Drukpa Kunley is depicted dressed similarly to the great Mahasiddhis, with a bare torso and a loin cloth. Elsewhere he is shown wearing normal lay dress with boots. For more on Drukpa Kunley, see p136.

PEMA LINGPA

The *terton* (treasure finder) Pema Lingpa (1450–1521) was born in Tang valley, Bumthang. The best-known statue of Pema Lingpa was made by Pema Lingpa himself and is kept at Kunzangdrak Goemba, Bumthang. Usually depicted in the *vajra* position, Pema Lingpa holds a *bumpa* (vase symbolising long life) in his hands and wearing a hat similar to that worn by Guru Rinpoche, with the notable addition of two *vajras* crossed at the front of it. For more on Pema Lingpa, see p175.

ZHABDRUNG NGAWANG NAMGYAL

The Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594–1651) is regarded as the founder of Bhutan, where he arrived from Tibet in 1616. The Zhabdrung has a distinctive white, pointed beard and wears monastic robes, and is seated in the lotus posture. In his left hands he holds a *bumpa* and his right hand is in the 'witness' mudra. Over his right shoulder is a meditation belt. The Zhabdrung wears a distinctive ceremonial hat of the Druk Kagyu order.



Guru Rinpoche



Milarepa



Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

Architecture

Bhutanese architecture is one of the most striking features of the country. Massive dzongs (fort-monasteries), remote goembas (monasteries) and lhakangs (temples), as well as the traditional houses all subscribe to a characteristic Bhutanese style. The lack of written plans, however, means there are many variations and very few structures sharing the same design. There are also regional variations dictated by local topography and available building materials.

HOUSES

The style of Bhutanese houses varies depending on the location, particularly the elevation. Thatched bamboo houses predominate in the lower altitudes in the south of the country, whereas at very high altitudes most homes are simple stone structures or even yak-hair tents. In the inner-Himalayan zone, such as those around Paro and Thimphu, are built in a characteristically Bhutanese style oddly reminiscent of Swiss chalets.

A typical Bhutanese house is two storeys high with a large, airy attic used for produce storage. In rural areas the ground floor is always used as a cattle barn and the upper floor as the living quarters. In most houses, one elaborately decorated room called a *choesum* serves as a chapel.

The foundation is made from stones placed in a trench and built up to a height of about 50cm above the ground. In central and eastern Bhutan the walls are usually made of stone. In the west the walls are 80cm to 100cm thick and are made of compacted earth, which provides an extremely strong, rigid and durable structure. To build these walls, a wooden frame is constructed then filled with damp mud. The mud is compacted by being pounded with wooden poles to which a flat ram is attached. When the wall reaches the top of the frame, the frame is shifted upwards and the process begins again.

The pounders are usually teams of women, who sing and dance as they beat the walls. Although Bhutanese women are usually shy and modest with outsiders, they traditionally loosen their inhibitions and exchange ribald comments with men as they perform the pounding, which can take several weeks for a large house. Once the mud wall is finished, it is either left in its natural colour or is whitewashed.

On the lower floor, an opening for a door, and perhaps some windows, is left in the mud wall that forms the front of the house, which traditionally faces south. The upper floor is supported by wooden beams that fit into holes in the mud wall. Central columns are used to support the beams, because it is difficult to find a single piece of timber to span the entire width of the house. The earthen walls for the upper floor form only the back of the house and the back half of the two side exterior walls. The front portion of the living area is always built of timber, which is sometimes elaborately decorated, with large divided windows facing south. The wooden portion of the house extends out over the front and side mud or stone walls.

Following tradition, and also structurally logical, the windows on the lower floor are small; larger windows are built on upper floors. In older houses the windows are sliding wooden panels, not glass. Above all, windows in Bhutan comprise a cut-out of a curved trefoil motif, called a *horzhing*. In Bhutan there are often several explanations for everything, and this motif is said to be either of Persian influence or simply a practical design which allows a person to look out of the window while the smoke blows out through the opening above their head.

An elaborate wooden cornice is usually built along the top of the wall directly under the roof of the house. Traditional roofs are pitched and covered with wooden shingles. Often the roofs leak because the pitch is insufficient or the shingles have been badly prepared. Shingles need to be replaced frequently and many people now choose corrugated sheet metal for their roofs. A feature missing in all Bhutanese architecture is a gutter – expect a soaking when you enter or leave a house during rain.

The internal walls, and often parts of the external walls, are built with a timber frame that is filled in with woven bamboo and plastered with mud. This construction is called *shaddam* (weave-mud).

The heavy wooden doors are made from several planks held firmly together using a tongue-and-groove technique. This technique is used to fit together all the woodwork, and not a single nail is used in a traditional structure. The door hinge is a pair of wooden pegs that fit into round holes above and below the door frame.

A large space is left below the roof. This serves as a place for storing hay or for drying animal skins and chillies. In winter the hay helps insulate the house. Sometimes woven bamboo mats are placed around the attic, but often it is simply left uncovered.

The stairways to the upper floor and attic are ladders made by carving steps into a whole tree trunk. If you find yourself climbing one of these ladders, reach around behind the right edge and you may find a groove cut there to serve as a handrail.

After a house is built, the all-important decoration begins. Wooden surfaces are painted with various designs, each with a special significance. Swastikas, floral patterns representing the lotus, cloud whirls and the *tashi tagye* (eight auspicious symbols) are the most common (see p64). Beside the front door are larger paintings, often of mythical animals such as the *garuda*, or large red phalluses. The phallus is not a fertility symbol; it is associated with the Lama Drukpa Kunley (see p136) and believed to ward off evil. A prayer flag called a *goendhar* is erected on the centre of the roof of all Buddhist homes.

DZONGS

Bhutan's dzongs are perhaps the most visibly striking architectural aspect of the kingdom. They are outstanding examples of grand design and construction. These huge, white citadels dominate the major towns and serve as the administrative headquarters of all 20 *dzongkhags* (districts) and the focus of secular and religious authority in each. As well as the large, active district dzongs, there are a few dzongs that have been destroyed or abandoned, or are now used for other purposes, such as Simtokha Dzong (p116), south of Thimphu, and Dobji Dzong, south of Chhuzom. Not all dzongs are ancient monuments; for example, a new dzong was built in Trashig Yangtse in eastern Bhutan in 1997.

Many dzongs had a *ta dzong* (watchtower), which was either part of the building, as in Jakar Dzong (p122), or a separate structure, as in Paro (p168) and Trongsa Dzongs (p164). This structure was also used as an ammunition store and dungeon. Many dzongs were accessed by cantilever bridges as an additional protective measure. Most dzongs have inward-sloping walls, an architectural feature known as battered walls, which can fool the eye and make the building look imposing and larger than its actual dimensions. They usually have only one massive door, which leads into a small passage that makes two right-angle turns before it enters the main courtyard. This is a design feature to keep invaders from storming the dzong.

During the time of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594–1651), the dzongs served their primary function as fortresses well and each was the stronghold of a *penlop* (regional governor). Many of the feuds and battles for control during

Wooden roofing shingles typically last about three years before they need replacing, hence the practical and ecological, but not necessarily aesthetic, shift to corrugated iron roofing.

The word *dzong* is of Tibetan origin and translates as 'fortress'. The dzong system is believed to have been introduced into Bhutan in 1153 by Gyelwa Lhanangpa, a monk from Dresung in Tibet.

According to tradition, no woman can be in a dzong between sunset and sunrise. This tradition has only been broken once, when the former Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, stayed in Trashig Chhoe Dzong, in Thimphu, after receiving special permission from the Je Khenpo.

Many houses are decorated with carved wooden phalluses, often crossed by a sword, which are hung at the four corners or over the door to ward off evil.

Building regulations insist all windows in a building (with the exception of toilet windows) must incorporate a *horzhing*, the very characteristic trefoil cut-out at the top of all Bhutanese windows.

GUARDIANS OF THE FOUR DIRECTIONS

Paintings or statues of the guardians, or kings, of the four directions appear on the *gorikha* (veranda) to guard the entrance to most lhakhangs. The guardians have an origin in ancient Mongolian tradition, and each one holds a different object. They are warriors who guard the world against demons and earthly threats.

Chenmizang, the red king of the west, holds a *chorten* and a snake, and is the lord of the *nagas* (serpents).

Yulkhorsung, the white king of the east, plays the lute and is the lord of celestial musicians.

Namthose, the gold king of the north, holds a mongoose and a banner of victory. He is a god of wealth and prosperity.

Phagchebo, the blue king of the south, holds a sword in his right hand.

the 17th to 20th centuries were waged by *penlops* whose troops attacked neighbouring dzongs. The key to success in these battles was to capture the dzong of the opposing *penlop*, thereby gaining control of that district.

Bhutan's dzongs were built of stone or pounded mud, and a considerable amount of timber, including massive beams and wooden shingle roofs. This, combined with the large number of butter lamps used in temples, has caused fires in almost all dzongs. Most of Bhutan's dzongs suffered severe damage during the 1897 earthquake and were repaired or rebuilt in their original style. All important dzongs have been (or are being) rebuilt using traditional construction methods, though in many places corrugated-iron roofs have replaced wooden shingles.

Bhutanese proclaim proudly that no nails are used to construct dzongs. Furthermore, dzong architects don't prepare any plans or drawings. They rely only on a mental concept of what is to be built, and this was how Thimphu's Trashi Chhoe Dzong was reconstructed in 1966.

Each dzong has unique details, but most follow the same general design principles. Most dzongs are divided into two wings: one containing temples and monks' quarters and one for government offices. The monastic wing of many dzongs actually serves as a monastery, with the resident monk body called a *rabdey*. In early days, most dzongs had a *rabdey*, but today only the dzongs of Thimphu, Punakha, Paro, Mongar, Trongsa, Jakar and Trashigang serve as monasteries. The *dratshang* (central monk body) maintains monastic schools in the dzongs of Punakha, Trongsa and Paro. Punakha Dzong is the seat of the chief abbot, His Holiness the Je Khenpo.

The main courtyard of the dzong is the *dochey*, which is paved with large flagstones. Along the outer walls of the dzong are several storeys of rooms and galleries overlooking the paved courtyard; these rooms are the monks' quarters and classrooms. Because the monastic wing of the dzong is physically separate from the secular wing, many dzongs have two docheys, the second being surrounded by administrative offices.

The central structure of the dzong is a tower-like building called the *utse*. In most dzongs, the *utse* has a series of chapels, one on each floor. On the ground floor of the *utse* is the lhakhang.

GOEMBAS & LHAKHANGS

Bhutan has an enormous number of religious buildings. According to the National Commission for Cultural Affairs there are 2002 such buildings – 437 are owned by the state in the custody of the *dratshang* and another 127 are in the care of reincarnate lamas. In addition, there are another 870 village lhakhangs and an estimated 568 that are privately owned. Each was designed for a different purpose to suit the wishes of the founders, architects or sponsors.

In Dzongkha, a monastery is called a goemba, and the word is pronounced quite differently from the corresponding Tibetan word, *gompa*. A primary reason for selecting the location of a monastery is to have a remote location where the monks can find peace and solitude. This is particularly evident in Bhutan where goembas are built atop rocky crags or on remote hillsides.

Several goembas in Bhutan were built at sacred caves that had previously been places of meditation. Taktshang in Paro (p128) and Kurjey in Bumthang (p173) are two famous examples that were built around caves where Guru Rinpoche is believed to have meditated for extended periods.

All Bhutanese goembas are different, but they all possess certain common features. They are self-contained communities, with a central lhakhang and separate quarters for sleeping. The lhakhang is at the centre of a *dochey*, similar to that of the dzongs, which is used as a dance arena during festivals.

On all religious buildings in Bhutan, and on dzongs too, a painted red band called a *khemar* runs just below the roof. One or more circular brass plates or mirrors representing the *nima* (sun) are often placed on the *khemar*. The golden deer sometimes seen above the entrance of a goemba, particularly Nyingma goembas, are symbols of the deer park at Varanasi where the Buddha did his earliest teachings.

The term lhakhang is a bit confusing because it may be used to refer to both the building itself and to the room inside the building that is the primary chapel. Furthermore, some goembas have several lhakhangs within the central building.

A typical lhakhang has a cupola and a gilded ball-shaped ornament, called a *serto*, on the roof. Most have a paved path around the circumference of the building. On the outside wall are racks of prayer wheels, which monks and devotees spin as they circumambulate the building.

The entrance to the lhakhang is through the *gorikha*, which is covered with murals, usually depicting the guardians of the four directions or a wheel of life. Entry is via a large painted wooden door that is often protected by a heavy cloth or yak-hair curtain. The door opens to a *tshokhang* (assembly hall), also called a *dukhang* or *kunre*. The hall is usually so large that it has rows of pillars to hold up the roof, and on its walls are paintings that describe the life of Buddha.

At the far end of the *tshokhang* is an elaborately decorated altar (*choesham*) that can be part of the main room or else be housed in a separate room or lhakhang. The two-tiered *choesham*, with its large gilded statue, is a focal point of the lhakhang, and depending on when and why the lhakhang was built, the statue may be of Sakyamuni, Guru Rinpoche or another figure. Jampa is the central figure in many lhakhangs built before Guru Rinpoche's visits to Bhutan, particularly those attributed to Songtsen Gampo. The central statue is usually flanked by two smaller figures, sometimes the consorts of Guru Rinpoche, and other deities related to the central image. (See p75 for the description of key deities.)

On the upper level of the *choesham* are *torma* (colourful sugar-and-butter ornaments) and various objects used in worship, such as a *dorji*, conch shells, trumpets made of thighbone, small drums and bells. On the lower tier are butter lamps and offerings of rice, flowers, water and money. Frequently, a silk parasol hangs over the altar. Often just a single butter lamp burns on the altar, unlike temples in Tibet where there may be hundreds of lamps burning. On auspicious occasions in Bhutan, however, 108 or even 1000 butter lamps are lit.

In most lhakhangs, often on the upper floor, is a room called a *goenkhang*, which is devoted to the protective and terrifying deities (see p76). The statues in these rooms are usually covered except when rituals are performed.

Entry to dzongs is through a single gate controlled by a policeman who restricts entry and enforces dzong protocol. Bhutanese are required to wear formal dress (*gho* for men and *kira* for women) and scarf (*kabney* and *rachu*) at all times within the dzong.

Often the entire population of the valley sought refuge in the dzong during a war.

To prevent potentially destructive fires in goembas, arrays of ritual butter lamps are often burned in a separate small building.

One way that lhakhangs in Bhutan differ from those in Tibet is that they feature a pair of elephant tusks alongside the altar to symbolise good. Buddhists revere the elephant because when the Buddha was born, his mother had a vision of a white elephant.

Because dzongs were usually placed on ridges, a tunnel was often constructed to the nearest water supply so that those in the dzong could survive a long siege.

When approaching a chorten or *mani* wall always walk to the left.

Weapons are stored in this room and may include old muskets, armour, and round shields made from rhinoceros hide. Teams of archers sometimes sleep in a *goenkhang* (chapel housing deities) before a major match, but women are never allowed to enter and the monks are reluctant to allow entry to any visitors.

If the lhakhang is in a monastery, then opposite the altar, facing the central image, is a throne upon which the abbot, or *khenpo*, sits during ceremonies. Between the *khenpo*'s throne and the altar are rows of cushions on which monks sit during prayers and ceremonies.

CHORTENS

A chorten is literally a receptacle for offerings, and in Bhutan all chortens contain religious relics. Chortens are often situated in locations considered inauspicious – river junctions, cross roads, mountain passes and bridges – to ward off evil. The classical chorten shape is based on the ancient Indian form of a stupa. Each of the chorten's five architectural elements has a symbolic meaning. The square or rectangular base symbolises earth. The hemispherical dome symbolises water. The conical or pyramidal spire symbolises fire (the spire has 13 step-like segments that symbolise the 13 steps leading to Buddhahood). On top is a crescent moon and a sun, symbolising air, and a vertical spike symbolising ether or the sacred light of the Buddha. Inside is placed a carved wooden pole called a *sokshing*, which is the life-spirit of the chorten.

Some chortens, such as the National Memorial Chorten in Thimphu (p104), are built in memory of an individual. Others commemorate the visit of a saint or contain sacred books or the bodies of saints or great lamas. Bhutan has three basic styles of chorten, usually characterised as Bhutanese, Tibetan and Nepali.

The Nepali-style chorten is based on the classical stupa. On Nepali chortens the four sides of the tower are painted with a pair of eyes, the all-seeing eyes of Buddha. What appears to be a nose is actually the Sanskrit character for the number one, symbolising the absoluteness of Buddha. The prototypes for the Nepali chortens in Bhutan are Swayambhunath and Bodhnath in Kathmandu. The large Chorten Kora in Trashi Yangtse (p195) and Chendebji Chorten near Trongsa (p161) are two examples of the Nepali style of chorten.

The Tibetan-style chorten has a shape similar to the stupa, but the rounded part flares outward instead of being a dome shape. Thimphu's National Memorial Chorten is an excellent example of this style.

The Bhutanese design comprises a square stone pillar with a *khemar* near the top. The exact origin of this style is not known, but is believed to be a reduced form of the classical stupa, with only the pinnacle and square base. Some Bhutanese chortens have a ball and crescent representing the moon and sun on top.

Several other types of chorten are also found in Bhutan. The *khonying* (two legs) is an archway that forms a gate over a trail. Travellers earn merit by passing through the structure, which is decorated with interior wall paintings and a mandala on the roof. The *mani chukor* is shaped like a Bhutanese chorten but is hollow and contains a large prayer wheel. It is built over or near a stream so that the water turns a wooden turbine below the structure, which then turns the prayer wheel.

www.ahf-bhutan.com documents the restoration of Buli Lakhang and the training of Bhutanese in building conservation techniques sponsored by the American Himalayan Foundation.

Another structure common in Bhutan is the *mani* wall. As its name implies, this is a wall with carved *mani* stones placed in it. Bhutanese *mani* walls are usually quite short, but long *mani* walls can be found in Bumthang.

Environment

Bhutan occupies a fascinating corner of the globe. Scientists have long considered the eastern Himalaya to be an area critically important in terms of global biological diversity. Add to this the legacy of isolation, the sheer inaccessibility of much of the country, low human population and a traditional reverence for nature, and you have the ingredients for a singular showcase of nature conservation within a region increasingly impacted by overpopulation and indiscriminate development.

THE LAND

Bhutan is a landlocked country about 300km long and 150km wide, encompassing 46,500 sq km. It is bounded on the northwest and north by Tibet and the rest of the country is surrounded by India: on the east by the state of Arunachal Pradesh; on the south by Assam and West Bengal; and on the west by Sikkim. Tibet's Chumbi valley, the old trade and expedition route from India to Lhasa, lies between the northern parts of Bhutan and Sikkim.

Virtually the entire country is mountainous, and ranges in elevation from 100m to the 7541m Gangkhar Puensum peak on the Tibetan border. It can be divided into three major geographic regions: the high Himalaya of the north; the hills and valleys of the inner Himalaya; and the foothills and plains of the south.

Greater Himalaya

A range of high Himalayan peaks forms part of the northern and western borders of the country. These are the thrones of the gods; almost none has been climbed, many are virtually unexplored and some are not even named. There are several high mountain passes that cross the Himalaya, but for the most part it remains an impenetrable snow-clad barrier (20% of the country is under perpetual snow). The Himalayan range extends from Jhomolhari (7314m) in the west to Kulha Gangri (7554m), near the centre point of the northern border. A chain of lower peaks extends eastwards to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Lunana region, just south of the midpoint of Bhutan's border with Tibet, is an area of glacial peaks and high valleys that are snowbound during the winter. A range of high peaks forms the southern boundary of Lunana, isolating it from the rest of the country.

Inner Himalaya

South of the high peaks lies a maze of broad valleys and forested hillsides ranging from 1100m to 3500m in elevation. This is the largest region of Bhutan and all the major towns, including Thimphu, are here. This part of Bhutan is cut by deep ravines formed by fast-flowing rivers that have their source in the high Himalaya. The hillsides are generally too steep for farming; most have remained covered in virgin forest.

The greater part of Bhutan's western border is formed by the Himalayan range, including the peaks of Jhomolhari and Jichu Drakye (6989m). Several forested ridges extend eastwards from this range, and these define the large valleys of Thimphu, Paro, Haa and Samtse. Between Punakha and Thimphu lies a well-defined ridge that forms the watershed between Thimphu's Wang Chhu and Punakha's Puna Tsang Chhu. The east-west road crosses this ridge through a 3050m pass, the Dochu La.

Geology of the Bhutan Himalaya by Augusto Gansser is a large-format book that comprehensively describes Bhutan's geology.

Millions of years ago the space Bhutan now occupies was an open expanse of water, part of the shallow Tethys Sea. The Tibetan plateau, or 'roof of the world', was beachfront property.

Trees and Shrubs of Nepal and the Himalayas by Adrian and Jimmie Storrs is the best field guide to the forests of Bhutan.

Birds of Bhutan by Carol Inskipp, Tim Inskipp and Richard Grimmett is a comprehensive, illustrated guide to Bhutan's avian treasures.

A range called the Black Mountains lies to the east of the Puna Tsang Chhu watershed, forming the major barrier between eastern and western Bhutan. Pele La (3500m) is the most important pass across the Black Mountains.

A north-south range of hills separates the Trongsa and Bumthang valley systems. The road crosses this ridge via Yotong La (3425m). Further east, the Donga range of hills follows the border that separates the Bumthang and Lhuentse districts, with Thrumshing La (3780m) as the crossing point for the road. Eastern Bhutan, which encompasses most of the Manas Chhu watershed, lies to the east of this range.

Thrumshing La provides the only road access across the Donga range, which drops precipitously on its eastern side to the Kuri Chhu. The steep Rodang La crosses the northern part of this range and there are few lower passes in the south that are still used by herders. The northern region just east of the Donga range is known as Kurtog. In the far east, another range of hills runs south from the Himalayan slopes to separate the Lhuentse and Trashi Yangtse valleys.

Southern Foothills

The foothills rise swiftly from the plains (known as the Terai), and except for a very narrow band of flat land, this part of the country is either forest or terraced farmland.

THE DUARS

The fertile valleys that extend 15km to 30km from the hills to the Indian states of Assam and Bengal are known as the duars, as is the lower portion of Bhutan's foothills. *Duar* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'passes' or 'gates', and is the origin of the English 'door'. Before the British annexed Bhutan's southern regions each *duar* was under the control of a Bhutanese *dzongpen* (lord of the dzong), but as they were malaria-infested they were largely unoccupied by the Bhutanese, who stayed in the northern hills.

Each *duar* is named after a river valley that leads out of Bhutan, though the *duar* itself is actually the land between two rivers. The land ranges from an elevation of about 100m to almost sea level at the Brahmaputra River, and the slope is barely perceptible. The fertile land now supports tea gardens, rice paddies and a few protected areas such as the Buxa Tiger Reserve.

Seven of the *duars* abut the border of Assam between the Dhansiri (Durlah) and Manas Rivers. The remaining 11, from the Manas River to the Teesta River in the east, border on the state of West Bengal.

Rivers

Rivers, or *chhus*, play an important role in Bhutan's geography, and their enormous potential for hydroelectric power has helped shape the economy. Flowing south, they have created deep valleys, making all east-west travel a tedious process of steep winding descent followed by an equally steep, equally winding climb to the next ridge. There are four major river systems in Bhutan, most known by several names as they flow through the country.

Most of the rivers have their headwaters in the high mountains of Bhutan, but the Himalaya range is not a continental divide, and there are three rivers that actually flow through the mountains into the country. The Amo Chhu flows from Tibet's Chumbi valley across the southwestern corner of Bhutan, where it becomes the Torsa Chhu, and exits at Phuentsholing. Two tributaries of the Manas, in eastern Bhutan, originate outside the country. The Kuri Chhu has its headwaters in Tibet (where it is known as the Lhobrak Chhu) and crosses into Bhutan at an elevation of only 1200m; the other tributary, the Gamri Chhu, rises in India's Arunachal Pradesh.

Conservation International's website on biodiversity (www.biodiversityhotspots.org) includes facts and figures on biodiversity in the Himalaya hotspot, including Bhutan. Although these hotspots collectively occupy 2.5% of the earth's space, they are home to 50% of the world's plant species and 42% of the world's vertebrates.

Wild Rhododendrons of Bhutan by Rebecca Pradhan is a beautiful guide to Bhutan's rhododendrons, with photographs of all 46 species.

The Thimphu Chhu, known in its lower reaches as the Wang Chhu, powers the Chhukha and Tala hydroelectric projects and eventually becomes the Raidak River in India. The Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu join at Punakha to form the Puna Tsang Chhu, which drains the area between the Dochu La and the Black Mountains. This river is known as the Sankosh when it reaches India. The Manas is Bhutan's largest river, draining about two-thirds of the country; in its upper reaches it is known as the Drangme Chhu. The Mangde Chhu flows from Trongsa and joins the Manas Chhu just before it flows into India. Unlike most other rivers that flow from Bhutan into India, the Manas retains its name when it crosses the border. All of Bhutan's rivers eventually flow through the duars to become part of the Brahmaputra, which is known in Tibet as the Yarlung Tsampo, with a source near Mt Kailash in the far west.

Because the central Himalaya of Bhutan receives the full brunt of the monsoon, Bhutan's rivers are larger and have created much broader valleys than rivers further to the west in Nepal and India. In their upper reaches, most Bhutanese rivers have created large fertile valleys such as those of Paro, Punakha, Thimphu, Haa and Bumthang. As the rivers pass through the centre of Bhutan, the valleys become steeper and narrower, and roads have to climb high on the hillside. In eastern Bhutan the Manas valley is generally broader, and some roads run alongside the river itself.

When they reach the plains, the rivers drop much of the glacial silt they have collected and follow a meandering course over gravel stream beds. There are several oxbow lakes in the plains where rivers have changed their course over the years.

WILDLIFE

Bhutan features a tremendous diversity of plants and animals living in a range of ecosystems from subtropical jungle barely above sea level to snowbound mountains above 7500m. The country's various habitats are believed to contain over 5500 species of plants, and close to 200 species of mammals and over 600 species of birds.

Animals

Large mammals abound in the wilds of Bhutan, but unless you are trekking or until Royal Manas National Park is opened up you will be very lucky to see more than a few examples. The neighbourhood of Royal Manas is home to a large variety of well-known south Asian game species: water buffalo, gaur, serow, wild pig and several species of deer: sambar, muntjac, chital, and hog. It is also the best place to see Asian elephants and the very rare greater one-horned rhinoceros.

On the high trails you may well be lucky enough to spot herds of blue sheep, or bharal. Blue sheep are goat-antelopes, taxonomically somewhere between goats and sheep, that turn a bluish-grey in winter and are found from 1800m to 4300m. Other mammals that prefer the high life include wolves, yaks and the diminutive, unusual musk deer. The male's musk gland is a highly valued perfume ingredient and this secretive deer is a target for indiscriminate poaching. Fat marmots whistle as you pass their burrows in the high alpine pastures and the curious takins (see p87) can be seen in northwestern and far northeastern Bhutan. However, the most likely place to see a takin is in the Motithang Takin Preserve in Thimphu (see p106).

MONKEYS

Several species of monkey are found in Bhutan and some of these are active throughout the day and may be seen not far from villages or a main road – so keep an eye on the roadside trees on those long drives. Most common are the

The most authoritative and complete guide to Bhutan's mammals, their identification, behaviour and distribution is *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Bhutan* by Tashi Wangchuk.

The musk deer is a primitive deer that has no antlers; both sexes have oversized canine teeth that protrude from its mouth, in males these protruding teeth can be 7cm long and are used in territorial battles.

The grey, golden and capped langurs have a specially adapted stomach for digesting leaves and are not an agricultural pest.

Assamese macaques: reddish brown, stumpy-tailed monkeys travelling on the ground in troops of 10 to 50 individuals. They are found throughout Bhutan up to 2900m. Rhesus macaques are similar and are the dominant monkey of the Indian plains. In Bhutan the bold rhesus is confined to the southern foothills.

Langurs are elegant, arboreal monkeys with graceful limbs and extraordinarily long tails and a charismatic presence. Three species of langur make a home in Bhutan's forests – up to 3600m in altitude, and usually high up in the forest canopy. The common grey or Hanuman langur is found west of Pele La; the capped langur is found east of the Manas Chhu in eastern Bhutan, while the famous golden langur is only found from the Puna Tsang Chhu in the west to the Manas Chhu in the east. This beautiful primate's existence was not even known to the scientific community until the 20th century. Not surprisingly, its distinctive feature is its golden coat.

BIG CATS

Several species of cat, ranging from the moggy-sized jungle cat to the powerful tiger, prowl the forests, valleys and mountains of Bhutan. The other cats are the Asiatic golden cat, marbled cat, pallas cat, leopard cat, fishing cat, lynx, clouded leopard, common leopard and the enigmatic snow leopard.

With its extraordinarily beautiful dappled silver coat, the snow leopard has been hunted relentlessly throughout its range (see below) and is now in danger of extinction. This elusive cat is almost entirely solitary, largely because a single animal's hunting territory is so vast and its prey is so scarce throughout its high-altitude habitat. However, when its favourite prey, the blue sheep, migrates to lower valleys in winter, the snow leopard follows. It is then that the sexes meet.

The essentially solitary tiger is a symbol of great reverence in Bhutan. They number probably around 100 animals, mostly concentrated in and around Royal Manas National Park, though tigers may be found throughout Bhutan, even at high altitudes (3900m), and as far north as Jigme Dorji National Park.

Several tiger conservation measures have been implemented in Bhutan and, coupled with the strong protected-areas system, has provided a favourable environment for the animal. It is believed the protected regions of Bhutan and India provide sufficient habitat to sustain viable breeding populations.

BEARS & PANDAS

There are two species of bear found in Bhutan. The omnivorous Himalayan black bear is a bane to farmers growing corn and fruit near the temperate

THE LEOPARD & THE FUNGUS

A tragedy is being played out in and beyond the mountains of Bhutan, featuring an exotic cast, high-stakes fashion and a plot that defies imagination. Some Chinese swimming coaches and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine have talked up the value of Bhutan's *yartsa goenbub* (winter-worm summer-plant), also known as caterpillar fungus, *Cordyceps sinensis*, associating this peculiar fungus with powers matched only by rhino horns, elephant tusks and tiger penises. Tibetan yak herders wandering in and out of Bhutan traditionally scooped up fungus to augment their meagre living, but the increased demand for *Cordyceps* has brought sudden wealth. And the knock-on effect has been felt most keenly by the big cats of Asia. Increasing numbers of new-money Tibetans with a hankering for traditional garb are providing a growing market for cat skins, particularly tiger and snow leopard, which adorn their *chuba* (cloaks). Bhutanese rangers in Jigme Dorje National Park are faced with increasing numbers of fungus gatherers; meanwhile, already endangered big cats across south Asia are enduring a new wave of poaching activity.

Though able to reach 80 years of age, elephants' life spans are determined by their teeth: their molars are replaced as they wear down, but only up to six times. When the final set is worn, the elephant dies of starvation.

THE TAKIN – BHUTAN'S NATIONAL ANIMAL *Tashi Wangchuk*

The reason for selecting the takin as the national animal is based both on its uniqueness and its strong association with the country's religious history and mythology. When the great saint Lama Drukpa Kunley, the Divine Madman, visited Bhutan in the 15th century, a large congregation of devotees gathered from around the country to witness his magical powers. The people urged the lama to perform a miracle.

However, the saint, in his usual unorthodox and outrageous way (see p136), demanded that he first be served a whole cow and a goat for lunch. He devoured these with relish and left only the bones. After letting out a large and satisfied burp, he took the goat's head and stuck it onto the bones of the cow. And then with a snap of his fingers he commanded the strange beast to rise up and graze on the mountainside. To the astonishment of the people the animal arose and ran up to the meadows to graze. This animal came to be known as the *dong gyem tsey* (takin) and to this day these clumsy-looking animals can be seen grazing on the mountainsides of Bhutan.

The takin continues to befuddle taxonomists. The famous biologist George Schaller called it a 'beesting moose'. In summer, takins migrate to subalpine forests and alpine meadows above 3700m and graze on the luxuriant grasses, herbs and shrubs found there. By migrating they escape the leeches, mosquitoes, horseflies and other parasites of the monsoon-swept lower valleys. This is also the time when the vegetation in the alpine region is richest in nutrition. Thus, takins gain several kilograms of storable energy: some males become massive, weighing as much as 1 tonne or more. Summer is also the time when takins mate. The gestation period is between seven and eight months, and young – usually a single calf – are born between December and February. These are black, in contrast to the adults with golden yellow and brownish coat. Sometimes the Himalayan black bear will follow a pregnant female takin and immediately after she has given birth, chase her away and eat the calf.

In late August takins start their slow descent to the lower valleys where the herds begin to break up. They arrive at the winter grazing grounds in temperate broadleaf forests between 2000m and 3000m by late October.

Hunting is banned by law and poaching is limited since there is no high economic value placed on the body parts of the takin. In traditional medicine, however, the horn of the takin, consumed in minute amounts, is supposed to help women during a difficult childbirth.

The major threats that the takin faces are competition with domestic yaks for food in the alpine regions and loss of habitat in the temperate regions. In the temperate zones, logging may have detrimental effects on the takin's survival.

forests (1200m to 3500m) it frequents, whereas the sloth bear is principally a termite eater and honey pirate found at lower altitudes. Bears do occasionally attack humans, probably because their poor eyesight leads them to interpret that a standing person is making a threatening gesture.

The red panda is known in Bhutan as *aamchu donkha* and is most commonly found near Pele La, Thrumshing La and parts of the Gasu district. It is bright-chestnut coloured, about 50cm long, including its bushy, banded tail, and has a white face. The red panda is nocturnal, sleeping in trees during the day and coming to the ground to forage on bamboo and raid birds' nests at night.

BIRDS

Each year Bhutan's extensive bird list grows longer, a consequence of Bhutan's rich biodiversity and the small amount of systematic birding that has been done in the kingdom. Nevertheless, over 600 species have been recorded and bird-watching tours are extremely popular.

Bhutan is rightly famous for its wintering populations of the vulnerable black-necked crane (see p88). Less well known are the winter populations, mainly as solitary individuals, of the endangered white-bellied heron, for

THE BLACK-NECKED CRANE

The rare and endangered black-necked crane occupies a special place in Bhutanese hearts and folklore. Its arrival every autumn from Tibet inspires songs and dances; it usually heralds the end of the harvesting season and also the time when farm families start migrating to warmer climates.

Many legends and myths exist about the bird, which the Bhutanese call *thrung thrung karmo*. Wetlands of the high mountain valleys of Phobjikha, Bomdeling and Gaytsa serve as the winter habitat for 400 to 500 birds. Like other cranes, these have an elaborate mating ritual, a dance in which pairs bow, leap into the air and toss vegetation about while uttering loud bugling calls. It can be difficult to distinguish the sexes because the coloration is so similar, but the females are slightly smaller. The crane's preferred delicacies include fallen grain, tubers and insects.

The world's entire population of 5600 to 6000 black-necked cranes breed in Tibet and Ladakh. As well as in Bhutan, they winter in south-central Tibet and northeastern Yunnan province in China.

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (www.rspn-bhutan.org) is committed to conservation, education and inspiring the Bhutanese populace. RSPN annually monitors the endangered black-necked cranes in the Phobjikha and Bomdeling valleys, and has produced documentary videos on the cranes.

The global conservation organisation, WWF (www.wwf.org), has a branch in Thimphu where it funds, manages and communicates with several conservation projects in Bhutan.

which there were about 15 records in 2005, in the vicinity of Punakha and Wangdue Phodrang.

Some bird species are even more transient, migrating through Bhutan between Tibet and northern India in autumn and spring. Pailas' fish eagle, which is considered rare, is regularly seen migrating up the Punak Chhu near Wangdue Phodrang in spring. It is often in the company of ospreys, a wide range of ducks, waders such as the pied avocet, and other species that breed in Tibet.

Winter brings numerous species down to lower altitudes, including accentors, rosefinches, grosbeaks, snow pigeons and pheasants such as the satyr tragopan, the Himalayan monal and the blood pheasant. Observant early-morning walkers can often find these on the mountains and passes around Thimphu. In summer many lowland species move to higher altitudes to breed; these species include the exotic-looking hoopoe, various species of minivets, cuckoos (one can commonly hear at least five different species calling), barbets, warblers, sunbirds, fulvettas and yuhinas.

Given the density of forest cover and the steep vertical descents, the road is often the best place from which to spot birds. Recommended stretches include the road down from Dochu La to Wangdue Phodrang (the adventurous can take the old trail, which is even better), from Wangdue Phodrang to Nobding (on the way to Pele La), and before Trongsa. For those who go east, the 2000m descent between Sengor and Lingmethang is spectacular: Ward's trogon and the Rufous-necked hornbill have been recorded in this area. Trekking will provide you with a greater chance of seeing high-altitude birds, including the lammergeier, the Himalayan griffon, the raven, the unique high-altitude wader – the ibisbill – and colourful pheasants.

Plants

An astonishing array of plants grow in Bhutan: over 5000 species, including more than 600 species of orchid, 300 species of medicinal plants and over 50 species of spectacular rhododendrons. Few countries could boast the variety of habitats from tropical jungle to alpine tundra in such a compact area. Because glaciation had no impact on the lower reaches of the Himalaya, these foothills remain repositories of plants whose origins can be traced back before the ice age. This area is home to some of the most ancient species of vegetation on earth.

Forests are found up to 4500m and serve not only as a source of fuel, timber and herbs, but also as a cultural resource, as they form the basis of many folk songs and ritual offerings. Though the government policy is to maintain at least 60% of the land as forest, the present ratio is higher, with a remarkable 72% of the country covered in forests of mixed conifers and broadleaf species.

THE BLUE POPPY

The blue poppy, Bhutan's national flower, is a delicate blue- or purple-tinged bloom with a white filament. In Dzongkha it is known by the name *euitgel metog hoem*. It grows to nearly one metre tall, on the rocky mountain terrain found above the tree line (3500m to 4500m). The flowering season occurs during the early monsoon, from late May to July, and the seeds yield oil. It is a monocarpic plant, which means that it blooms only once. It grows for several years, then flowers, produces seeds and dies. Poppies can be found atop some high passes from the far eastern parts of the country all the way across to the west.

At one time the blue poppy was considered to be a Himalayan myth, along with the yeti. In 1933 a British botanist, George Sherriff, who was in Bhutan studying Himalayan flora, found the plant in the remote mountain region of Sakten in eastern Bhutan. Despite this proof that the flower exists, few people have seen one; a mystique surrounds the species in the same way it does the snow leopard.

TROPICAL & SUBTROPICAL

Tropical evergreen forests growing below 800m are unique repositories of biodiversity, but much of the rich vegetation at these lower elevations has been cleared for pasture and terraced farmland. In the next vegetation zone (900m to 1800m) are the subtropical grasslands and forests of chir pine, oak, walnut and sal. Above groves of bamboo, numerous varieties of orchid and fern grace the branches of forest giants.

TEMPERATE

The temperate zone (1800-3500m) is a region of great diversity. The tropical vegetation of the lower zones gives way to dark forests of oak, birch, maple, magnolia and laurel. On most hills, the sunny south side is forested with broadleaf species such as oak, and the damp, shady north side with rhododendron and conifers, particularly blue pine. Spring is the time to see the magnificent red- or cream-flowering rhododendrons of Bhutan. In the autumn you will see the mauve or pinkish blooms of the Himalayan wild cherry.

SUBALPINE & ALPINE

Between the tree line and the snow line at about 5500m are low shrubs, dwarf rhododendrons, Himalayan grasses and flowering herbs. Junipers are also found in a dwarfed form at altitudes over 4000m. Their distinctive foliage, short prickly needles and fleshy, berry-like fruit, is unmistakable.

As the snows begin to melt at the end of the long winter, the high-altitude grazing lands are carpeted with a multitude of wildflowers, which remain in bloom until early summer. After the onset of the monsoon, in July, a second and even more vibrant flowering occurs, which extends until the end of the monsoon in late August. Some of the varieties found at these higher elevations include anemones, forget-me-nots, dwarf irises, dwarf rhododendrons, primulas, delphiniums and ranunculus.

NATIONAL PARKS & PROTECTED AREAS

There are four national parks, four wildlife sanctuaries and one nature reserve, which together constitute about 26% of the country, or 10,758 sq km. In 1999 an additional 3800 sq km was designated as a network of biological corridors linking all nine protected areas.

All but three of the protected areas encompass regions in which there is a resident human population. Preserving the culture and fostering local tradition is part of the mandate of Bhutan's national-park system. The government has developed zoning policies and an integrated conservation

The two plants that produce the ingredients in *doma* (betel nut) grow in the *duars* in southern Bhutan. The nut comes from the *khair*, a palm, and the leaf used to wrap it comes from the betel-leaf vine.

and development program to allow people living within a protected area to farm, graze animals, collect plants and cut firewood.

Bhutan established its national-park system to protect important ecosystems, and for the most part they have not been developed as tourist attractions. Apart from one or two exceptions, you won't find the kind of facilities you may normally associate with national parks, such as entrance stations, camping grounds and visitor centres. In many cases you won't even be aware that you are entering or leaving a national park.

Jigme Dorji National Park

Jigme Dorji National Park is the largest protected area in the country, encompassing an area of 4329 sq km. It protects the western parts of Paro, Thimphu and Punakha Dzongkhags (districts) and almost the entire area of Gasa Dzongkhag. Habitats in the park range from subtropical areas at 1400m to alpine heights at 7000m. The park management has to cope with the needs of both lowland farmers and seminomadic yak herders, and three of the country's major trekking routes pass through the park. Villagers are also allowed to harvest a wide variety of indigenous plants for use in incense and traditional medicines.

The park is the habitat of several endangered species, including the takin, snow leopard, blue sheep, tiger, musk deer, red panda, Himalayan black bear and serow. Other mammals to be found are leopards, wild dogs, sambars, barking deer, gorals, marmots and pikas. More than 300 species of birds have been catalogued within the park.

Royal Manas National Park

The 1023-sq-km Royal Manas National Park in south-central Bhutan adjoins the Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park to the north and India's Manas National Park and Manas Tiger Reserve to the south. Together they form a 5000-sq-km protected area that runs from the plains to the Himalayan peaks.

The area has been protected as a wildlife sanctuary since 1966 and was upgraded to a national park in 1988. It is the home of rhinos, buffalos, tigers, leopards, gaurs, bears, elephants and several species of deer. It is also home to several rare species, including the golden langur, the capped langur and the hispid hare. The 362 species of birds in the park include four varieties of hornbills. Unfortunately, because of security concerns related to separatist groups in India, at the time of research it was not possible to visit Manas.

Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park

The 1400-sq-km Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park protects the range of hills that separates eastern and western Bhutan – the Black Mountains. It is important because it protects virgin forests of the Himalayan foothills, which have been largely cleared in neighbouring Nepal and India.

Plant life in the park includes a wide range of broadleaf species, conifers and alpine pastures. Animals include tigers, Himalayan black bears, leopards, red pandas and golden langurs, and an amazing 449 species of birds have been catalogued. The Phobjikha valley, wintering place of black-necked cranes, is included in the park.

Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary

A 278-sq-km area was set aside in 1974 as a wildlife reserve and upgraded to the Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary in 1993. On the southern border of Bhutan, about 50km east of Phuentsholing, it was established to protect the only remaining natural sal forest in Bhutan. Several protected species thrive in the sanctuary, including chital deer, elephants, gaurs, tigers, golden langurs and hornbills.

In the international market *Cordyceps sinensis* (caterpillar fungus) can fetch up to US\$10,000 a kilogram!

The Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (www.bhutantrustfund.org) was established with an endowment from conservation organisations and various government aid agencies of more than US\$30 million. The fund uses its investment revenue to supplement (and eventually to replace) external donor financing for Bhutan's environmental management.

Thrumshing La National Park

The 768-sq-km Thrumshing La National Park lies between Bumthang and Mongar. It was set aside to protect old-growth temperate forests of fir and chir pine. It is also home to red pandas and several endangered bird species including the Rufous-necked hornbill, the Satyr tragopan and the chestnut-breasted partridge.

Bomdeling Wildlife Sanctuary

The 1545-sq-km Bomdeling Wildlife Sanctuary protects most of the area of Trashi Yangtse Dzongkhag. Within the reserve is a large area of alpine tundra. The sanctuary protects the habitat of blue sheep, snow leopards, red pandas, tigers, leopards, Himalayan black bears and musk deer. It also protects the Bomdeling area, which is an important wintering ground of the black-necked crane.

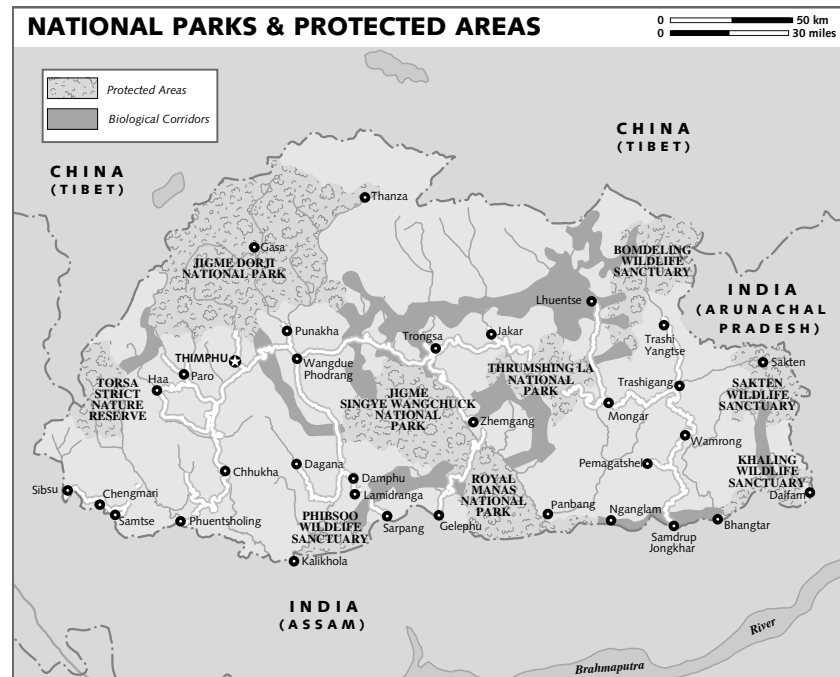
Sakten Wildlife Sanctuary

The Sakten Wildlife Sanctuary protects several species endemic to the east; it is also renowned as the only reserve in the world created to protect the habitat of the yeti. It's in the easternmost part of the country, where 650 sq km of temperate forests of blue pine and rhododendron are protected.

Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary

In far southeastern Bhutan, 273 sq km have been set aside as the Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary. Wild elephants, gaurs, pygmy hogs, hispid hares and other tropical wildlife are protected here. This sanctuary adjoins a comparable reserve in India.

Between March and May the hillsides are ablaze with the deep red flowers of the *etho metho*, the country's most famous rhododendron. There are 46 species of rhododendron that occur throughout the country at altitudes between 1200m and 4800m, ranging from small shrubs to 20m trees.



Torsa Strict Nature Reserve

The Torsa reserve is in the western part of the Haa district, where the Torsa river enters from Tibet. The 644-sq-km reserve was set aside to protect the temperate forests and alpine meadows of far west Bhutan and is the only protected area with no resident human population.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Bhutan emerged into the 20th century with much of its forests and ecosystems intact. But now, with an increasing population, improved roads and communication and limited farming land, a major effort is required to protect the country's natural heritage.

Natural-resource utilisation now has equal, if not more, ecological pressures from urban populations as from rural consumers. However, growing awareness of environmental issues has prompted appropriate conservation measures. Among these are requirements for environmental assessments for all new public or private investment projects, and nationwide bans on the commercial export of raw timber and the use of plastic bags. Bhutan has consciously decided to forego immediate economic gain from exploitation of its natural resources in order to preserve its environment for long-term sustainable benefits.

Firewood

Wood is used as fuel in rural areas and in most monasteries (in urban areas cooking gas or kerosene is used), and it was probably only Bhutan's low population that spared the forests before conservation planning was introduced. Managing firewood harvesting is a major problem. At almost 2.8 cubic metres per person, Bhutan's annual consumption of firewood is one of the highest in the world – and that represents about 375,000 trees. Wood accounts for 80% of energy consumption, and although the government is promoting electricity as an alternative source of energy, few rural households have electricity.

Grazing & Farming Practices

Conservation issues centre on human-wildlife conflicts, such as crop and livestock depredation by wild predators, and the deterioration of high-altitude wildlife habitat from grazing pressure. There are now programs under way to balance the needs of traditional herders and farmers with wildlife protection.

A significant amount of shifting cultivation ('slash and burn', called *tseri* in Dzongkha) is practised in Bhutan, particularly in the east. The practice

You can easily distinguish the chir pine from its relative, the blue pine, because the needles of the chir pine are in groups of three and those of the blue pine are shorter and in groups of five.

GLOBAL WARMING'S FIRST CASUALTIES?

According to those with vested interests, global warming from human activity has yet to be proven. Meanwhile small villages in Bhutan and other regions of the Himalaya, which hardly contribute to the greenhouse gas surplus, are preparing to be the first casualties of the very real rise in global temperatures. Across the Himalaya, glacier lakes are filling up with melt water, and in recent decades scientists have documented a tenfold jump in glacier-lake outbursts. In Bhutan there are currently 24 lakes poised to burst.

In 1994 a glacier-lake outburst in Bhutan swept 10 million cubic metres of water down the Pho Chhu. It flooded a number of villages and killed 23 people in Punakha, 80km away. While too much water is pouring from the mountains now, a probable longer term consequence of the shrinking Himalayan glaciers is a significantly reduced water supply to almost a quarter of the world's population in India, China and Pakistan.

is officially banned and several methods, including education and fertiliser supply, are being implemented to change this practice.

Poaching

While the Bhutanese generally observe their own conservation policies, the open southern and northern borders offer opportunities for poaching of both plant and animal life. Many species are sought for their alleged medicinal or other valuable properties. Killing and poaching are unacceptable in Buddhist tradition, but the high prices that wildlife products such as rhino horn, tiger bone, musk and *Cordyceps sinensis* command outside Bhutan present major challenges to conservationists.

The Department of Forestry Services (DFS) operates effective anti-poaching programs designed to protect endangered plants and animals, enforce forestry rules and control trade in wildlife parts and products. A national network of foresters regulates timber harvesting, and road checkpoints are operated throughout the country to monitor the transportation of forest products.

Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti by Kunzang Choden describes Bhutanese beliefs about where and how this mysterious creature may live.

Food & Drink

If you haven't eaten Bhutanese cuisine before then you are in for a surprise. The Bhutanese love chillies; there are dishes where chillies are the main ingredient and these mouth-scorching meals may well be accompanied by chilli-infused condiments. It will bring tears of joy to the eyes of chilli lovers – all others beware! Of course, most travellers will not necessarily experience local food at its fiery zenith. All-inclusive travel means hotel-restaurant food (see p247), where toned-down Bhutanese is offered along with continental, Indian and Chinese dishes. Although chillies are ubiquitous, don't expect the aromatically spiced dishes so typical of the subcontinent. These can only be found in the Nepali-influenced south of Bhutan or in an Indian restaurant.

All large towns have restaurants, and in Thimphu you can find Indian, Thai, Italian and other cuisines, as well as a plethora of local cafés. In remote villages the fare is likely to be the national dish, *ema datse* (chillies and cheese), and meat of questionable vintage. If you are ordering from a menu, don't be surprised if many of the offerings are not available.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Traditional Bhutanese food always features devilish red or green chillies. *Ema datse* comprises large green (sometimes red, but always very hot) chillies, prepared as a vegetable, not as a seasoning, in a cheese sauce. The second-most popular dish is *phak sha lapthu* (stewed pork with radish). Other typical dishes, always served with chillies, are *no sha huentsu* (stewed beef with spinach), *phak sha phin tshoem* (pork with rice noodles) and *bja sha maroo* (chicken in garlic and butter sauce).

One dish that is frequently available is *dal bhat* (rice and lentils), the traditional mainstay of Nepal. Hotel and trekking cooks make some excellent nonspicy dishes, such as *kewa datse* (potatoes with cheese sauce) and *shamu datse* (mushrooms with cheese sauce). *Tohsey* is a delicious salty, spicy mixture of vegetables and rice made gluggy with cheese. More seasonal are the delicious asparagus and unusual *nakey* (fern fronds), the latter typically smothered in the ever-present *datse*.

Pork fat is a popular dish in the wilds because of its high energy content. Western visitors find it almost inedible because it is usually quite stale or is just fat with lumps of hairy skin attached – no meat whatsoever!

Meat is frequently dry and stringy. There are no slaughterhouses, and only a few cold-storage facilities. Beef and fish come from India, often travelling long distances in unrefrigerated trucks. Avoid beef during the monsoon season, and be very wary of pork at any time. During the summer you are usually limited to chicken, or a vegetarian diet. Yak meat is sometimes available, but only in the winter. You will rarely find mutton or lamb served in Bhutan.

Several Tibetan-style dishes are common in Bhutan. Small steamed dumplings called *momos* may be filled with meat or cheese – delicious when dipped in a chilli sauce. Fried cheese momos are a speciality of several Thimphu restaurants. *Barthu* is a Bhutanese version of another typically Tibetan dish, *thukpa* (noodles), which may be fried or served in soup. Village people also eat *tsampa*, the Tibetan-style dish of roasted-barley flour mixed with salt and yak-butter tea and kneaded into a paste. Look for the strings of rock-hard, dried yak cheese, *chugo*, hanging from shop rafters, but be careful of your teeth.

Although there is plenty of white rice, the Bhutanese prefer a locally produced red variety, which has a slightly nutty flavour. At high altitudes where rice is not available, wheat and buckwheat are the staples. *Zow* is rice

that is boiled and then fried. It's sometimes mixed with sugar and butter and is commonly carried in a *bangchung* (covered basket). In Bumthang *khule* (buckwheat pancakes) and *puta* (buckwheat noodles) replace rice as the foundation of many meals. A common snack food in the east is *gesasip*, corn (maize) that has been fried and beaten.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

Indian-style sweet milky tea (*ngad-ja*) is widely available and may be served in a pot, but more often it appears as a cup with a tea bag. Bhutanese frequently drink *sud-ja*, Tibetan-style tea with salt and butter, which is more like soup than tea, and surprisingly tasty and warming on a cold day. Filter coffee and espresso is available in the top-end hotels and a few restaurants in Thimphu, but elsewhere 'coffee' is invariably of the instant variety.

Avoid drinking tap water anywhere in Bhutan and remember that the flasks in hotel rooms are sometimes filled with untreated water. Bottled mineral water is widely available and most restaurants will give you boiled water to drink if you ask for it. For advice on water purification, see p272.

Alcoholic Drinks

The only beer brewed in Bhutan is the very good Red Panda *weissbier*, an unfiltered wheat beer bottled in Bumthang. Throughout the country there's an ample supply of imported canned beer – Tiger from Singapore and Singha from Thailand, or several brands of Indian beer, which comes in large (650mL) bottles. The most popular brands are Black Label, Golden Eagle and Dansberg from Sikkim. If you want a cheap high, try one of the brands with 8% alcohol content: Hit, Volcano or 10,000.

There are several brands of whisky, including Special Courier, Black Mountain Whisky (better known as 'BMW'), Royal Supreme and Changta, the cheapest. The better brands compare favourably with good Scotch whisky. There are local rums: XXX Bhutan Rum is the strongest, and gins such as Crystal and Pacham. Most hotels also have a stock of international brands.

Wine is available at the duty-free shop in Thimphu, though it is likely to be expensive and disappointing.

The most common local brew is *bang chhang*, a warm beerlike drink made from wheat. The favourite hard drinks are *arra*, a spirit distilled from rice, and *sinchhang*, which is made from millet, wheat or rice.

VEGETARIAN & VEGANS

There is a good variety of vegetarian food available, although much of it is made using a liberal amount of chilli and a smothering of cheese sauce. Ingredients such as nettles, fern fronds, orchids, asparagus, taro and several varieties of mushrooms appear in traditional Bhutanese vegetarian dishes. Vegans should ask if a dish contains cheese (or eggs) when ordering.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Mealtime is a typically relaxed time in Bhutan. It is a social event and family get-together; however, the time spent eating may depend as much on how much is put on the table as the need for conversation. Three meals a day is typical, and it is not unusual for those three meals to all consist of rice and *ema datse*. At a hotel restaurant the full cutlery ensemble will be provided, but in a local café you may be limited to the option of a spoon or using your right hand and bowl of rice to mop up the meal.

One of the great Bhutanese vices is chewing *doma*, also known by its Indian name, *paan*. The centrepiece is a hard *Areca catechu* nut that is chewed as

Bhutan has 28 beekeepers employing European honeybees. In spring look for white transparent honey produced from white clover, while in winter enjoy the very dark honey from buckwheat flowers.

Throughout the country alcohol is not served before 1pm and after midnight. Tuesday is a 'dry day' when hotels and restaurants don't serve alcohol.

Look for fresh asparagus from April to June, and wild mushrooms, apples and peaches later in the summer when mangoes and avocados from the south also appear. Papaya hits the stalls in March and April.

If you bite into a bunch of hot chillies, a few mouthfuls of plain rice will often help ease the pain. Also a spoonful of sugar seems to absorb some of the fiery oil.

members.tripod.com /thinley/recipe/is a concise website with several traditional recipes and some background to Bhutanese cuisine.

a digestive. The nut is mixed with lime powder (the ash, not the fruit), and the whole collection is rolled up in a heart-shaped betel leaf and chewed slowly. It's a bittersweet, mildly intoxicating concoction and it stains the mouth bright red. When the remains are spat out, they leave a characteristic crimson stain on the pavement.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Useful Phrases

Where is a ...?

**local bar
restaurant**

... *gāti mo?*
changkha
zakha

I don't eat meat.

This is too spicy.

**I don't like food with
chillies.**

Is the food good?

This is delicious.

Please give me a cup of tea.

Do you have food now?

It's enough.

nga sha miza
di khatshi dū
nga zhêgo êma dacikha miga

zhêgo zhim-mă ga?
di zhim-mă
ngalu ja phôp gang nang
chô dato to za-wigang in-na?
digi lâm-mă

Food Glossary

beer (local)

whisky (local)

tea

water

boiled water

cold water

hot water

bang chhang
ârra
ja
chhu
chhu kôkôu
chhu khôm
chhu tshatom

cabbage

cauliflower

cheese

chicken (meat)

chilli

cooked vegetable

corn (maize)

egg

fish

food

meat

mushroom

mustard

noodles

potatoes

radish

rice (cooked)

salad

slices

turnips

vegetable

hot

hot (spicy)

tasty

banda kopi
meto kopi
datse
bja sha
êma
tshöse tsotsou
gäza/gesasip
gongdo
ngasha
zhêgo/to
ha
shamu
päga
bathu/thukpa
kewa
laphu
to
ezay
pa
öndo
tshöse
tshatom
khatshi yömi
zhimtoto

There is an array of accoutrements associated with chewing *doma* that many men carry in the pouch of their *gho*. The ingredients are carried in ornate boxes and there are special knives designed to slice the nuts.

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