

Dylan's Trip
to
India, Nepal and Bhutan

December 2010-January 2011

A Short Guide to Places and Issues of Interest

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DELHI, INDIA

New Delhi is the capital of India. It's where we arrive in India.

Delhi is an exciting mix of peoples and languages. Delhi is two very different worlds, the 'old' and the 'new', each providing different experiences.

Spacious New Delhi was built as the imperial capital of India by the British. Old Delhi served as the capital of Islamic India.



The **Red Fort** is one of Delhi's top tourist sights. A brilliant red sandstone fort built by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan as his ruling palace. Shah Jahan also built the Taj Mahal.



Jama Masjid, opposite the Red fort, next to Chandni Chowk, a busy central street in Old Delhi, is the largest mosque in India. It was also built by the [Mughal](#) Emperor [Shah Jahan](#), builder of the [Taj Mahal](#). It was completed in the year 1656.



The **Qutub Complex** houses structures dating from the Slave Dynasty (1206-1290) and is a World Heritage Site. The most famous structure in the complex is Qutub Minar. It is a 72.5m minaret and was the tallest "skyscraper" in the world when built (1193-1368).

We will travel around Delhi a lot in auto rickshaws like the one in the photo.



AGRA, INDIA

Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal is the most beautiful monument built by the Mughals, the Muslim rulers of India. Taj Mahal is built entirely of white marble.

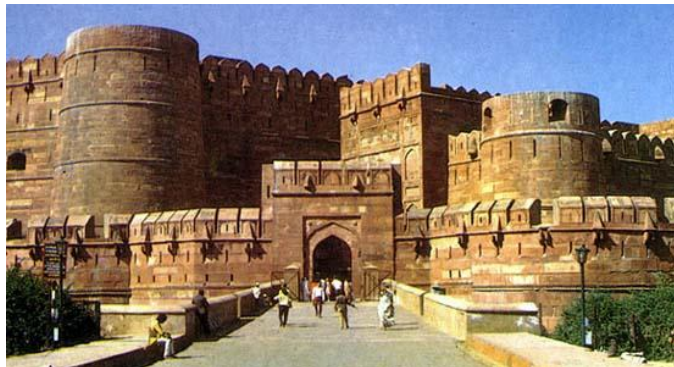


Taj Mahal was built by Emperor Shah Jahan in the memory of his wife and queen, Mumtaz Mahal. Taj Mahal (meaning Crown Palace) is a mausoleum that houses the grave of queen Mumtaz Mahal at the lower chamber. The grave of Shah Jahan was added to it later. The Taj Mahal took 22 years to build and employed more than 20,000 workers.

Agra Fort

Agra Fort was built as a military base by the great Mughal ruler, Akbar, in 1565. It was converted into a palace during Shah Jahan's time. Although the main structure was built by Akbar, many additions were made by later rulers.

The colossal walls are 6 metres high. The structures inside the fort give an impression of a city within the city. The marble pearl mosque inside the fort is one of the most beautiful mosques in India.



Fatehpur Sikri

Fatehpur Sikri is a city built mostly in red sandstone 37 kms from Agra. It was built by the Mughal Emperor, Akbar. He had planned this city as his capital but



shortage of water compelled him to abandon the city. Today it is a ghost city.

Fatehpur Sikri is one of the finest examples of Mughal architecture.

NAINITAL, INDIA

Nainital is one of the most popular hill stations* of India. It's our first stop on the motorbike part of the trip.

It is famous for its lake.

Nainital is set among the towering peaks of the Kumaon Hills in two parts, with the lake separating them.

Nainital features in many Indian myths and legends; and has religious significance for Hindus.

The town was destroyed during the Landslip of 1880, and later rebuilt by the British.



The weather in Nainital is quite pleasant. Summers are mildly warm and temperatures may reach 22C. During winter, temperatures may be sub-zero. The town receives snowfall during December and January. We will be there in winter!

*NOTE: Hill station is a term used for a town located at a higher elevation than the nearby plain or valley. The term was used mostly in colonial Asia, particularly India, for towns founded by European colonial rulers as refuges from the summer heat. In India, most hill stations are at an altitude of approximately between 1,000 and 2,500 metres and were much cooler than the lower countryside. (Canberra is about 600 metres above sea level.)

BARDIA NATIONAL PARK, NEPAL

The Royal Bardia National Park is the largest and most undisturbed wild area of the Terai region of the Nepal Himalayas. The Terai – the lowland hills and valleys of southern Nepal – extends all along the Indian border.

Bardia was a royal hunting reserve of Nepal's Rana rulers from 1846 to 1950. In Nepal, wildlife lost whatever protection the royal hunting reserve provided when the Rana rule ended in the 1950s.



What makes a visit to Nepal's Royal Bardia National Park particularly special is the presence here of one of the last known herds of wild Elephants in South Asia. The herd, numbering less than two dozen, roams these remote jungles in western Nepal.

Seeing these wild Elephants' greyish-white bulk rising above the morning mists and hearing them trumpet across the jungle clearing are some of the most remarkable wildlife experiences to be had on our planet.

To view the wild Elephants, you ride on the backs of specially-trained elephants, each guided by a driver. You might spot a mother Rhino leading her baby down to the river for a drink, or even an elusive Royal Bengal Tiger. It's a very special experience unlike any other wildlife setting in Nepal.



The last picture above has this caption: A group of gharials and a mugger on a sand bank of the Karnali River (Bardia National Park). Do you know what a gharial or a mugger is?

LUMBINI, NEPAL

Lumbini is situated at the foothills of the Himalayas in modern Nepal.

It is the place where the Buddha was born. In the Buddha's time, Lumbini was a beautiful garden full of green and shady Sal trees. Maya Devi, his mother, gave birth to the child on her way to her parents' home in Devadaha while taking rest in Lumbini under a sal tree in 642 B.C.

In 249 BC, when the Emperor Ashoka visited Lumbini it was a flourishing village. Ashoka constructed four stupas and a stone pillar with a figure of a horse on top.

Lumbini remained neglected for centuries. In 1895, great pillar was discovered. Further exploration and excavation of the surrounding area revealed the existence of a brick temple and a sandstone sculpture within the temple itself which depicts the scenes of the Buddha's birth.



The temple of Maya Devi was constructed over the foundations of more than one earlier temple or stupa, and this temple was probably built on an Ashokan stupa itself.

Recently, several beautiful shrines have been built by devotees from Buddhist countries. A visit to Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, is not only for spiritual enlightenment but also for solace and satisfaction that one gets in such a calm and peaceful place.

POKHARA, NEPAL

In no other place do mountains rise so quickly.

In the south the city borders on a lake at an elevation of about 800m above sea



level. In the north, at an elevation of around 1,000m, the outskirts of the city touch the base of the Annapurna mountain range.

Pokhara lies on an important old trading route between China and India. It also became an important trading place on the routes from Kathmandu

and from India to Tibet.

On a hill overlooking the lake from the south is the World Peace Stupa built in 1996 with a view of the lake, across the city and of the snow peaked mountain ranges.

The best viewpoint of Pokhara is Sarangkot from where four lakes and the whole Annapurna range can be seen to the west of the city.

Paths and a road lead almost to the top of Sarangkot with an excellent view of the mountains and the city. On the summit of Sarankot there is a Buddhist stupa (monastery), which also attracts many tourists.



The major touristic attractions of Pokhara are its scenic views in and around town. The Seti gorge runs through the whole city from north to south. At places it is only a few metres wide and the river is so far down below that, at places it is not visible or audible.

SARANGKOT, NEPAL

Sarangkot is a semi developed village.

The village is located on a mountainside ridge at an altitude of 1600m with panoramic Himalayan views. The village overlooks the city of Pokhara and its lake on the north-western outskirts of the city.



It is the highest viewpoint easily accessible from Pokhara: Two hours walk up the staircase, or get most of the way up by local bus or Taxi.



Sarangkot has great views in all four directions, Pokhara below, The Annapurna Range including its highest peaks, Rolling Hills off to the sunset and a rural lanscape out along the ridge road.

This is a most popular spot for sunrise watchers who come up in the morning and head back to

Pokhara after breakfast

KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Kathmandu is the largest city and capital of Nepal.

The heart of Kathmandu is Durbar Square which is crowded with palaces and temples, including the current incarnation of the Kasthamandap or "Wooden house" that gives the city its name. The square has been in active use since the construction of a palace around 1000 AD.



house" that gives the city its name. The square has been in active use since the construction of a palace around 1000 AD.

Swayambhu is a large stupa, highly revered in Nepal, and one of the most sacred Buddhist sites in the country. It offers great views over the city, and there's no lack of monkeys.

Baudha Stupa in Baudha is one of the most sacred sites for Tibetan Buddhism. It is a must see in Kathmandu.

Narayanhiti Palace Museum - The once Royal palace was turned officially in 2009 partly into a Museum and the Foreign Ministry. Now you can visit the splendid Halls of the main building of the palace.

Pashupatinath - An important temple to Shiva in the form of Lord of Animals.

HETAUDA, NEPAL

Hetauda is a highly developed industrial city of Nepal. There are several factories, breweries, dairy farms, vegetable oils and fishing farms.

There are also many interesting temples.

Hetauda is located at the intersection of two major highways and surrounded by three rivers. We reach it while travelling along the main highway from Kathmandu towards India, although there is a shorter, unsealed road that we might take!



The town has important industry but is also an attractive and 'green' town. It is surrounded by two distinct mountain ranges.

Amongst Hetauda's attractions are the Martyr Memorial Park, built in honour of the Nepalese martyrs, and the Makwanpur Gadhi, a fort with historic importance.

DHARAN, NEPAL

In the east of Nepal, right at the foot of hills, lies the beautiful city of Dharan.

Dharan grew after the British setup the *Gurkha* Recruitment Centre* in 1953, which helped many Nepalese earn employment.



Two ethnic groups, namely, Rais and Limbus used to constitute the major portion of Gurkha soldiers.

Dharan is one of the holy places of Nepal. It has numerous temples.

Many Hindu pilgrims visit holy temples located in this region.

*Gurkha, also spelt Gorkha, are people from Nepal and northern India who take their name from the 8th century Hindu warrior-saint Guru Gorakhnath. Descendants of his disciple, Bappa Rawal, founded the house of Gorkha, which in turn founded the Kingdom of Nepal.

Gurkhas are best known for their history of bravery and strength in the Indian Army's Gorkha regiments and the British Army's Brigade of Gurkhas.

The Gurkhas were designated by British officials as a "Martial Race". "Martial Race" was used to describe "races" (peoples) that were thought to be naturally warlike and aggressive in battle.



BIRATNAGAR, NEPAL

Biratnagar is Nepal's second biggest city.

In a way, it is a transit point for all kinds of legal and illegal trades with India.

It acts as a way for tourists to get entry into Indian hill stations such as Darjeeling.

Biratnagar has also become the melting pot for the various religions and cultures in the Tarai.

The place is known for its vibrant culture activities.

There is a weekly haat (Communal Market) on Wednesdays in downtown Biratnagar. We may get to visit it.

We cross the border back into India here.



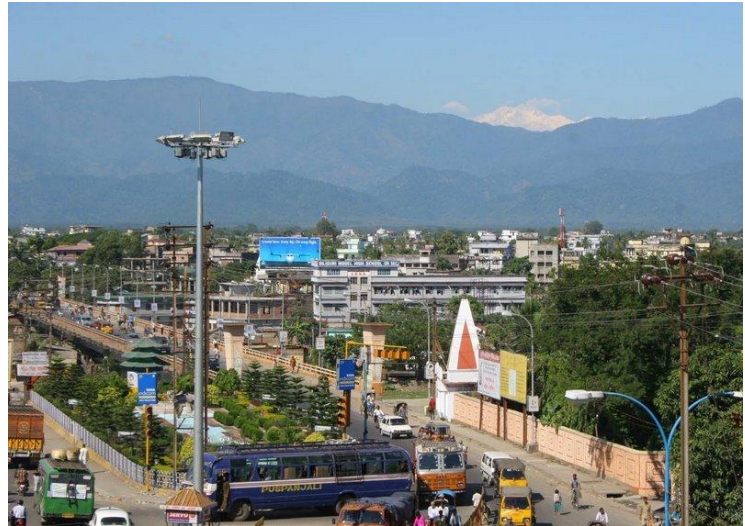
Main street of Biratnagar, Nepal

SILIGURI, INDIA

Siliguri is the main commercial city of North Bengal and has strategic importance because of its location near international borders.

Only a century ago, Siliguri was just a small village. Agriculture was the only occupation of its inhabitants.

After partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the city of Siliguri became a crowded refugee centre. Today it is the second largest city in West Bengal.



Its strategic importance lies in its location close to India's borders with Bangladesh, China, and Nepal.

It's also a hub of transportation to major centres.

Because of its location, it contains a mixture of different people, religions, cultures and languages.

DARJEELING, INDIA

Darjeeling became important when the British first established a hill station there and discovered that the area was well suited for tea plantations.



In 1849, the British annexed the area and Darjeeling became a part of British India.

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was opened in 1881 and the town became the summer capital of the British Raj. The railway is world-famous and we follow its trek up the mountainside.

The main attractions are the cultural diversity (many Tibetan refugees moved here after Tibet was annexed by China and they co-exist with the descendants of the many Nepalese labourers brought to work in the tea plantations) and the beautiful views (including the wonderful vista view of Kanchenjunga – the world's 3rd highest peak).

The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute was created by the late Tenzing Norgay. He was a Sherpa who climbed Mount Everest on 29th of May 1953 with Sir Edmund Hillary. All the equipment used in that climb is in the institute.

The Himalayan Zoo has a good collection of animals found in the Himalayan region and is a centre for breeding the beautiful snow leopard.

Tiger Hill is ideal to visit early morning when the first rays of the sun shine on Mt Kanchenjunga and give it a golden colour.



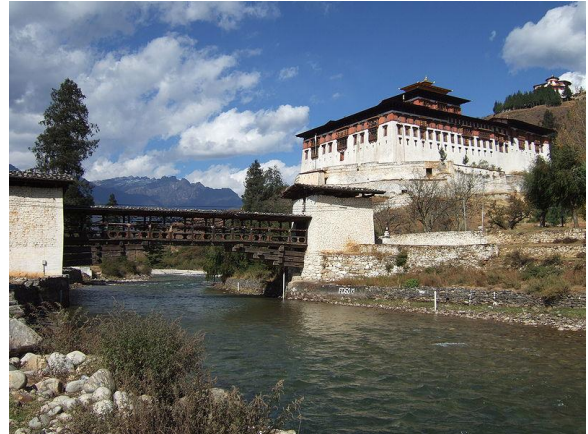
The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway is the first, and still the most outstanding example of a hill passenger railway. It was inscribed on the list of World Heritage sites.

PARO, BHUTAN

Paro is the name of a district, valley, river and town. It is one of the most historic valleys in Bhutan. Both trade goods and invading Tibetans came over the pass at the head of the valley, giving Paro the closest cultural connection with Tibet of any Bhutanese district.

Important cultural sites include:

- Taktshang, or Tiger's Nest, the most famous monastery in Bhutan (see next page);
- Drukgyel Dzong, at the upper end of the valley, built to protect against invading Tibetans, but in ruins since a fire in the 1950s (photo below);
- Rinpung Dzong, also known as Paro Dzong (photo opposite). Scenes from the movie Little Buddha were filmed in and around this dzong.



Rinpung Dzong, a fortress-monastery overlooking the Paro valley, has a long history.

A monastery was first built on the site at the beginning of the tenth century, but it wasn't until 1646 that Ngawang Namgyal built a larger monastery on the old foundations.

For centuries it was an effective defence against numerous invasion attempts by the Tibetans.

On the hill above the Dzong stands an ancient watchtower called Ta Dzong, which, since 1967, has been the National Museum of Bhutan.

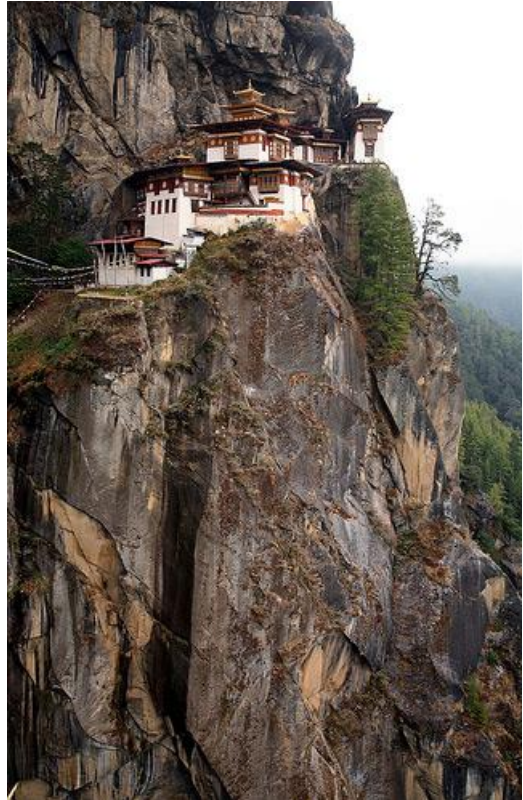
TIGER'S NEST DZONG AT PARO, BHUTAN

The Taktshang Monastery stands precariously at the edge of a cliff 700 metres above the base of Paro valley. It was built in 1692 and is one of the most holy religious spots of Bhutan.

The word 'Taktshang' translates as "Tiger's Nest".

The legend behind the construction of the Taktshang Monastery dates back to the 8th century. Guru Rinpoche or Padmasambhava, revered as the second Buddha, was thought to have miraculous powers. He is said to have travelled from place to place in the company of vanquishing demons (dakinis).

Yeshe Tsogyal, the former wife of an Emperor, joined his group and willingly became a flying tigress to carry the guru to the cliff top where the Taktshang Monastery stands. One of the caves became the meditation spot for Guru Rinpoche and later it was venerated as the holy spot for the monastery. It became known as the Tiger's Nest because of the flying tigress.



It is said that where Guru Rinpoche decided to land, the air-borne dakinis bore building material on their backs to facilitate the construction process. It has remained a place of worship for the people. It was badly damaged by fire in 1998; and has been renovated.

Today you can visit all the temples of the Taktshang Monastery standing at an altitude of 3,000 metres.

What is remarkable about the Tiger's Nest Monastery is the variation of the four temples. One of these is fabled to be the famous spot for the three-month meditation of Guru Rinpoche and the birthplace of one of the leading lamas.

THIMPHU, BHUTAN

Thimphu is Bhutan's capital city. The population of Thimphu is about 90,000. It is located in the west of Bhutan.

Although the Thimphu Valley has supported small settlements for many centuries and a dzong has existed there since 1216, the city didn't really develop until the king declared Thimphu the new capital in 1961.

Norzin Lam is the city's main thoroughfare and is lined with hotels, shopping complexes and hotels.

Thimphu is modern in age only: new buildings are still based on traditional designs with elaborately painted trefoil-shaped windows and nail-less wooden frames.

Among its sights are the Tashicho Dzong, a 350-year-old structure refurbished in 1961 to house government departments and ministries.



The king's throne room is in this Dzong. As the nation's largest monastery, it is the summer quarters of 2,000 monks and the Je Khenpo, the spiritual leader and head of the monks.

You can shop for local crafts at the multilevel Government Handicraft Emporium or at one of several privately run emporiums.

Thimphu's weekend market is the biggest in Bhutan and well worth a stop. Although many of the crafts items are manufactured imports from India and Nepal the extensive area of fresh grains and vegetables is worth at least an hour's walk-through.

PUNAKHA, BHUTAN

Punakha was the capital of Bhutan until the 1960s.

The Punakha Dzong is the main attraction, but there are also other sites of interest in and around this pleasant little town.



The Punakha Dzong was constructed in 1637-38. It is the winter home of Bhutan's Central Monastic Body led by Je Khenpo.

In 1907, Punakha Dzong was the site of the coronation of the first King of Bhutan.

Three years later, a treaty was signed at Punankha whereby the British agreed not to interfere in Bhutanese internal affairs and Bhutan allowed Britain to direct its foreign affairs.

In 1987, the dzong was partially destroyed by fire.

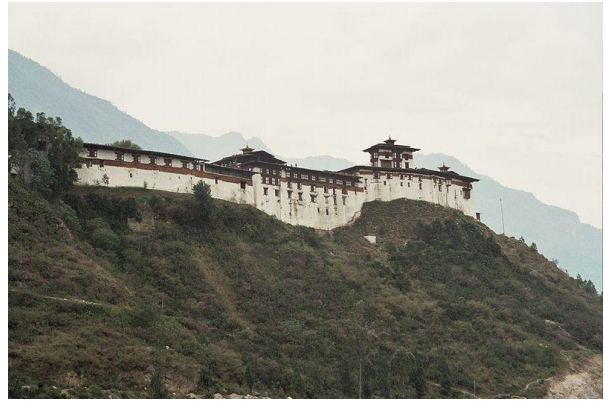
Due to its location at the confluence of the Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers in the Punakha-Wangdue valley, the dzong is vulnerable to flash flooding caused by glacier lakes.

A covered wooden cantilever bridge crossing the Mo Chhu river was built together with the Dzong in the 17th century. This bridge was washed away by a flash flood in 1957 or 1958. In 2006 work started on a new covered wooden cantilever bridge of traditional construction with a free span of 55 metres which was completed in 2008.



WANGDI PHODRANG, BHUTAN

Wangdi Phodrang is a town that shares its name with the dzong, built in 1638, which dominates the district. The name is said to have been given by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal who was searching for the best location for a dzong to prevent incursions from the south. At the chosen spot the Shabdrung encountered a boy named Wangdi playing beside the river and hence named the dzong "Wangdi's Palace".



CHUZOMSA, BHUTAN

Nine kilometres east from Wangdi Phodrang at Chuzomsa, is located Kichu Resort.

Overlooking the Dang chu river at an elevation of 1500 metres, the resort has attractive alpine scenery.

Every visitor is lavished with genuine Bhutanese hospitality and friendly service. With 21 delightful rooms and a suite, the Kichu resort is a true oasis of comfort. The superb Bhutanese vegetarian cuisine served in its modern restaurant is a real treat.

TRONGSA, BHUTAN

Trongsa is one of Bhutan's most historic towns, and the first monastery was built here in 1543.



The town's dzong is particularly impressive and is often described as a dragon flying over mountain peaks. It was constructed in 1644.

The dzong served as the original seat of power of the House of Wangchuck before it became the ruling dynasty of Bhutan in 1907.

All kings of Bhutan are first given the title of penlop (governor) of Trongsa, and the first and second kings ruled from the town.

The main bazaar is a smart street of three storey white traditional houses.

Trongsa can also be a good shopping stop. The local population weaves its own textiles from hand-dyed wool and the Tibetan-origin Bhutanese shopkeepers sell them at more competitive prices than those found in Thimpu. They also sell machine woven carpets in the traditional style. These are also sold at more reasonable prices than those found in Thimpu.



JAKAR, BHUTAN

Spacious and surrounded by tree covered mountains, the valley in which Jakar is located is considered to be one of the most beautiful in all Bhutan.

The Jakar area is a centre of Vajrayana Buddhism and there are many monasteries and sacred sites located here.



The cluster of villages below the dzong, which are collectively known as Jakar Town, have a population of around 5,000.

Jakar Dzong was originally constructed in 1667, but rebuilt after being severely damaged in an earthquake in 1897. It is one of the largest and most impressive dzongs in Bhutan and houses the administrative and monastic offices for the Bumthang district.

Wangdicholing Palace, built in 1857, served as the principal summer residence of the first and second kings of Bhutan. It is an unassuming structure, lacking the ramparts and protective walls which became standard features of later palaces.

Kurje Lhakhang (also Kurjey) is one of Bhutan's most sacred monasteries. A body print of Guru Rinpoche is preserved in a cave around which the oldest of the three buildings is built. The original building was constructed in 1652 by Trongsa Penlop, while the latest addition was added by the late Queen Mother Ashi Kesang Wangchuk in 1990.



A huge cypress tree (or perhaps a decedent tree) that over hangs the building is said to have grown from Guru Rinpoche's walking stick.

MONGAR, BHUTAN

The long ride from Jakar to Mongar takes us along one of the most spectacular roads carved into vertical cliffs, spectacular waterfalls and lush vegetation. The sound of the rushing streams and cascading waterfalls greets you as you look down at the valley looming in the distance below the precipitous rock face.

Mongar marks the beginning of eastern Bhutan. The second largest town in the subtropical east, Mongar is built high on a gently sloping hillside.

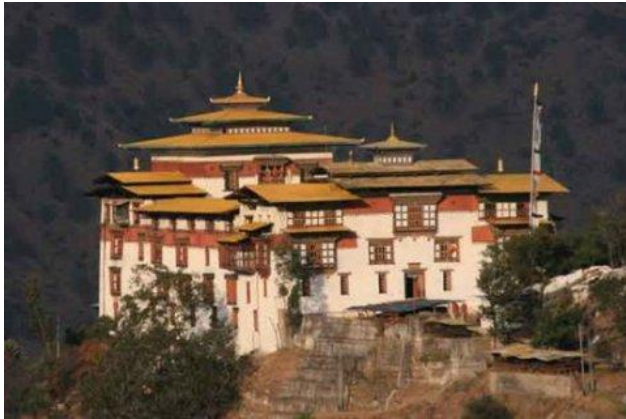


Mongar Dzong was built in 1930. A visit to Mongar Dzong shows one how traditional Bhutanese architecture has continued to thrive through the centuries. Although built in the 1930s and one of Bhutan's newest dzongs, it is constructed in the same way as all earlier dzongs, without plans or nails.

TRASHIGANG, BHUTAN

The inhabitants of Trashigang district are mainly Sharchops, which means "easterner" in Dzongkha, the national language.

The Sharchops appear to mix Indian and Tibetan blood whereas the Ngalops of central and western Bhutan appear to be mainly Tibetan.



Trashigang is a primary route for Bhutanese trade with India.

Trashigang Dzong, or fortress, was built in 1659 to defend against Tibetan invaders. Because of its altitude, invading armies remarked that "it is not a dzong on the ground. It is in the sky".

Gom Kora is an ancient lhakhang or temple in the district, known for its rock garden. It contains a sacred footprint said to be either that of Guru Rimpoche or that of a khandroma (angel).

SAMDRUP JONGKHAR, BHUTAN

This town is small and bustling and acts as a commercial hub and entry and exit point in the south east.

It is the headquarters of a district boasting a brand new Dzong, although it is basically a town of small shopkeepers who serve all of eastern Bhutan as far as Mongar and Lhuntshi.



GUWAHATI, INDIA

Guwahati is the largest city in Assam, Northeast India.

Excavations trace the origins of the city to around the 6th century and it was the capital of Assam until the 10th century. Currently, the city has a population of around one million, making it the largest city in the state and its main centre for shopping and business.



The slow, meandering Brahmaputra River is a focal point of the downtown while the lush hills of the Shillong Plateau provide a verdant backdrop for the suburbs. The pleasant environment, however, is somewhat tempered by the lack of investment in the region, which is apparent from the low quality of roads.

If you cannot go on a river cruise, at least cross the river on the ferry. Ferries provide transport to the local people. They leave the jetty at Fancy Bazaar every half an hour and the round trip will take around 45 minutes. It's a simple way to enjoy the scenic beauty of the river Brahmaputra

Uma Nanda Temple is a 17th century temple dedicated to Shiva. It's on an island in the middle of the Brahmaputra river-Peacock island. From the island you will get a good view of the riverside.

INDIA'S HOLIEST RIVER: THE GANGES (GANGA)

The Ganges is a mighty river that rises in the Himalaya Mountains and flows 2,500kms to the great delta in Bangladesh. It has the largest volume of water of any river in India.

Hindus regard the Ganges as the holiest of rivers. It was named after the goddess Ganga, the daughter of the mountain god Himalaya. There are many significant pilgrimage sites along the river.



Bathing in the Ganges at a Ghat

Bathing in the river is believed to wash away one's sins. To bathe in the Ganga is a lifelong ambition for Hindus and they congregate in incredible numbers for several important festivals.

Water from the Ganges is used to cleanse any place or object for ritual



Ghats on Ganges at Varanasi

purposes. It is believed that any water that mixes with even the smallest amount of Ganges water becomes holy with healing powers. Hindus also cast the ashes of their dead in the river in the belief that this will guide the souls of the deceased straight to paradise.

It is also important as a national river. Many former imperial capitals

were located on its banks.

The Ganges, above all is *the river of India*, which has held India's heart captive and drawn uncounted millions to her banks since the dawn of history. The story of the Ganges, from her source to the sea, from old times to new, is the story of India's civilization and culture, of the rise and fall of empires, of great and proud cities, of adventures of man... (Jawaharlal Nehru, First Prime Minister of India, born in Allahabad on the Ganges)

One of the holiest cities in Hinduism, Varanasi, is situated on the banks of the Ganges. It is also one of the oldest continually inhabited cities of the world. Other important cities on the Ganges include Allahabad and Kolkata.

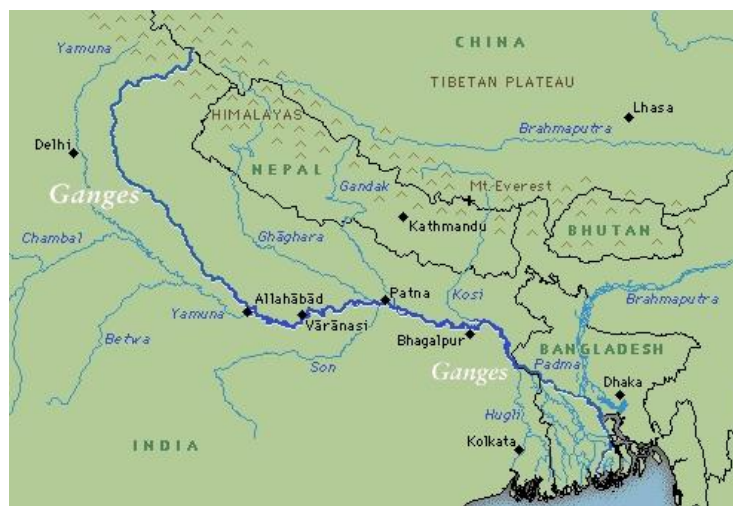


Ghats on Ganges at Brijghat

We cross the Ganges on our way from Delhi to Nainital. We'll do this at Brijghat.

Brijghat is a part of the larger city of Garhmukteshwar. Brijghat is famous for its temples, which number about one hundred. It also has many ghats (stair access) that allow Hindu pilgrims to bathe in the Ganges.

Ganga Brijghat, the charity that Ferris Wheels is associated with – run by Amar's mother and family – is in Brijghat.



MUGHAL EMPIRE

Mughals came to the Sub-continent (today's India and Pakistan) when Zahiruddin **Babur** conquered Delhi in 1526.

This also laid the foundation for the Mughal Empire, which then went on to rule the Sub-continent for next three centuries. Babur was a very dynamic and enterprising ruler. He ruled for only four years as he died in 1530.



Mughal Emperor Babur

Humayun, Babur's son, succeeded him but he faced several tough times when he ascended the throne because his father had died before he could consolidate his empire. There were Afghan rulers who were powerful enough to compete with Humayun for the throne. Sher Shah Suri brought Afghans to power and temporarily put an end to the Mughal rule after he defeated Humayun in 1540.

Sher Shah Suri was quick to capture most of the Sub-continent and this opened a great chapter of excellent administration in the history of India. His five-year rule ended tragically with his accidental death in 1545. After his death, his son reigned for nine years and his son Firuz Shah succeeded him in turn in 1554.

But all this was only a temporary hindrance in the restoration of the Mughal Dynasty, which was established once again by Humayun in 1555. But Humayun died just a year later, in 1556.



Mughal Emperor Akbar

It was then that the most important and by far the most eventful period of Mughal reign began when **Akbar**, son of Humayun, took over after his father's death.

Akbar was hardly thirteen when he ascended the throne and went on to rule for almost half a century. Akbar is well remembered for his statesmanship, which was based upon good will towards all. Akbar was a great admirer of art and architecture and constructed many palaces and monuments during his reign. The famous ones are the Red Fort and the Fateh Pur Sikri located at

Agra. Akbar was tolerant of all other religions and did not differentiate between Hindus and non-Hindus.

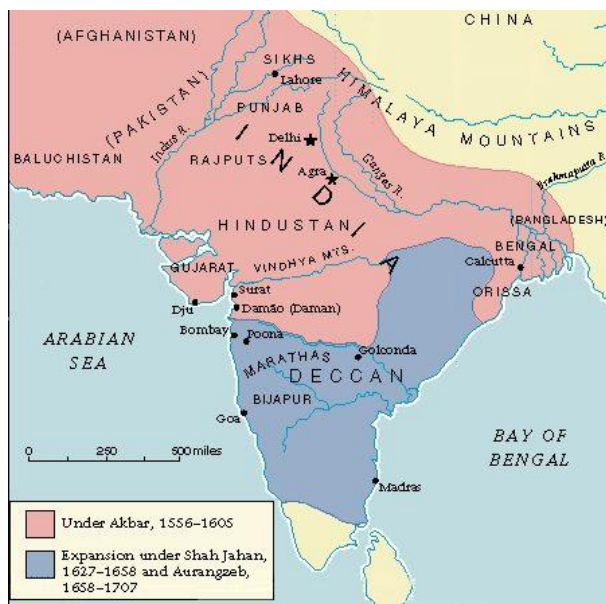
Akbar's death brought his son **Jahangir** to the throne in 1605. Jahangir's reign is dented with many rebellions which he successfully countered. His greatest achievement was the conquest of the fortress of Kangara in Punjab. It was captured after a struggle, which lasted 14 months.

Shah Jahan followed Jahangir in 1628, and to this day Shah Jahan is known for the magnificent monument of Taj Mahal which he had built in memory of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. But Shah Jahan was accused by his son, Aurangzeb Alamgir, of extravagance and he held his father captive; and after some resistance from his brothers came to power in 1658. Shah Jahan remained imprisoned for eight years where he was treated very well but was kept away from the administration of the Empire.



Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan and his wife, Mumtaz Mahal

Aurangzeb Alamgir is known in history for his Islamic works. He was a pious man who lived like any other ordinary man of India while he was on the throne. He had seen the way his father had led his life and despised it strongly. Therefore, he preferred to work more for the social good of his people.



Although the Mughal Empire continued after the death of Aurangzeb, it's decline started right after the birth of this great Mughal Emperor.

Bahadur Shah Zafar was the last Mughal emperor. He ascended the throne in 1837 and was forced to leave in 1857 after the famous rebellion after which the British imprisoned Bahadur Shah in a fort and from then became the real rulers of the Sub-continent till 1947.

THE STORY OF BUDDHA

Buddha can refer to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni or to anyone who has attained full enlightenment.

The Buddha who is the founder of the Buddhist religion is called Buddha Shakyamuni.

“Shakya” is the name of the royal family into which he was born, and “muni” means “able one.”



Lumbini, birthplace of Buddha

Buddha Shakyamuni was born as a royal prince in 624 BC in Lumbini, Nepal. His mother’s name was Queen Mayadevi and his father’s name was King Shuddhodana.

One night, Queen Mayadevi dreamed a white elephant descended from heaven and entered her womb. This indicated that she had conceived a child who was a pure and powerful being.

The young prince was named “Siddhartha.” It was foretold that he would become a Buddha and his influence would pervade “the thousand million worlds like the rays of the sun.”

As he grew up he mastered all the traditional arts and sciences without needing any instruction. The prince would take every opportunity to follow spiritual paths and convey encourage others to do so.

Sometimes Prince Siddhartha would go into the capital city of his father’s kingdom to see how the people lived. These encounters led him to realise that all living beings have to experience the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing and death. He developed a wish to free all of them from their suffering.

Realising that only a fully enlightened Buddha has the wisdom and the power to do this, he resolved to leave the palace and retire to the solitude of the forest where he would engage in profound meditation until he attained enlightenment.

He later escaped from the palace. After he had traveled about six miles, the prince cut off his hair and threw it into the sky. One of the gods then offered the prince the saffron robes of a religious beggar. The prince accepted these and gave his royal garments to the god in exchange. In this way he ordained himself as a monk.



Siddhartha then made his way to a place near Bodh Gaya in India, where he found a suitable site for meditation. He practised a form of meditation that involved deep concentration to eliminate all distraction and ignorance; triumph over all the demons of the world; and focus on the goal of enlightenment. He sat in the meditation posture beneath a Bodhi tree and vowed not to rise from meditation until he had attained perfect enlightenment. Because he triumphed over all the demons of this world, he subsequently became known as a “Conqueror Buddha.”

Statue of Buddha



Statue of Buddha

Buddha became a great teacher. His teaching became the basis of the Buddhist religion. They centre on the idea of “Dharma.” Dharma” means “protection”. By practising Buddha’s teachings we protect ourselves from suffering and problems. Practising Dharma is the supreme method for improving the quality of our human life. The quality of life depends not upon external development or material progress, but upon the inner development of peace and happiness.

MOUNT EVEREST

Mount Everest is the world's highest mountain. It's 8,848 metres (or 29,028 feet) high.

New Zealander, Edmund Hillary, and Nepalese Sherpa¹, Tenzing Norgay, were the first people known to have reached the summit of Mount Everest. They did so on 29 May 1953 as part of a British expedition.

The expedition set up Base Camp in March 1953. They then set up their final camp at South Col. On 26 May, two members of the expedition set out for the summit but had to turn back because their oxygen system failed. Hillary and Tenzing were then directed to make an attempt to reach the summit.



Mt Everest. South Col is lowest point of the sunny ridge in the right background

Snow and wind held the pair up at the South Col for two days. They set out on 28 May and pitched a tent at 8,500 m (27,900 feet).



Tenzing Norgay on summit of Mt Everest
29 May 1953

On the following morning, Hillary discovered that his boots had frozen solid outside the tent. He spent two hours warming them before he and Tenzing attempted the final ascent wearing 14 kg packs.

The crucial move of the last part of the ascent was the 12 m (40-foot) rock face later named the "Hillary Step". Hillary saw a means to wedge his way up a crack in the face between the rock wall and the ice and Tenzing followed. From there the following effort was relatively simple.

They reached Everest's 8,848 m (29,028 ft) summit, the highest point on earth, at 11:30 am. As Hillary put it, "A few more whacks of the ice axe in the firm snow, and we stood on top."

They spent only about 15 minutes at the summit.

Hillary took the photo of Tenzing posing with his ice-axe, but since Tenzing had never used a camera, Hillary's ascent went unrecorded.

¹ The Sherpa are an ethnic group from the most mountainous region of Nepal high in the Himalayas. The term Sherpa is also used to refer to local people who are employed as guides for mountaineering expeditions in the Himalayas.

Tenzing left sweets and biscuits in the snow as a Buddhist offering to the gods. Hillary left a cross that he had been given.

The two had to take care on the descent after discovering that drifting snow had covered their tracks, complicating the task of retracing their steps.

Hillary described the peak as "a symmetrical, beautiful snow cone summit".

Hillary was one of the members of an expedition in 1951 that discovered the southern route to the top of the mountain.

There were two routes from Base Camp to South Col: via the Lhotse Face or via the Khumbu Icefall.

In the 1953 expedition, Hillary forged a route through the Khumbu Icefall.



Edmund Hillary (left) and Tenzing Norgay approaching summit, 28 May 1953



The "Hillary Step" on ascent to summit

In 1952, Tenzing reached the then record height of 8,599 m (28,215 feet) during a Swiss expedition.

Mount Everest was named after Sir George Everest, the surveyor-general of India who was the first to produce detailed maps of the Indian subcontinent including the Himalayas.



Hillary and Tenzing at hillside camp after reaching summit



Mountaineers climbing ladder over Khumbu Icefall