

Shining Shangri-La Tour

A Very Rough Guide

Preface

This guide (entirely and unashamedly lifted from other sources) tries to follow the Shining Shangri-La itinerary for the Ferris Wheels tour. Its purpose is to present in one place some highlights of the tour; and, hopefully, save participants from buying several guide books.

Some of the Internet sources are not necessarily objective so you may need to make some mental adjustments. Of course, I can't vouch for the accuracy of the material.

NAINITAL

Nainital is set in a valley containing a pear-shaped lake, approximately two miles in circumference, and surrounded by mountains, of which the highest are Naina (2,615 m (8,579 ft)) on the north, Deopatha (2,438 m (7,999 ft)) on the west, and Ayarpatha (2,278 m (7,474 ft)) on the south. From the tops of the higher peaks, "magnificent views can be obtained of the vast plain to the south, or of the mass of tangled ridges lying north, bounded by the great snowy range which forms the central axis of the Himalayas."^[1]



It is believed that Nainital figures in some ancient myths of India. In the *Manas Khand* of the *Skand Puranas*, Nainital Lake is called *Tri-Rishi-Sarovar*, hinting at the story of three sages (or *rishis*), Atri, Pulastya and Pulaha, who, upon finding no water in Nainital, dug a large hole at the location of the present day lake (*sarovar* = lake) and filled it with water from the holy lake Manasarovar in Tibet. According to lore, a dip in Naini Lake, "the lesser Manasarovar," earns merit equal to a dip in the great lake.

It is also believed that The Naini Lake is one of the 64 *Shakti Peeths*, or religious sites where parts of the charred body of Sati (Parvati) fell on earth while being carried by Lord Shiva. The spot where Sati's eyes (or *Nain*) fell, came to be called Nain-tal or lake of the eye. The goddess Shakti is worshipped at the Naina Devi Temple on the north shore of the present day lake.^{[4][5]}

In September 1880 a landslide (**the Landslip of 1880**) occurred at the north end of the town, burying 151 people. The first known landslide had occurred in 1866, and in 1879 there was a larger one at the same spot, Alma Hill, but "the *great slip* occurred in the following year, on Saturday 18 September 1880."^[7] "Two days preceding the slip there was heavy rain, ... 20 inches (508 millimetres) to 35 in (889 mm) fell during the 40 hours ending on Saturday morning, and the downpour still lasted and continued for hours after the slip. This heavy fall naturally brought down streams of water from



the hill side, some endangering the Victoria Hotel, ... (which) was not the only building threatened ... Bell's shop, the Volunteer Orderly Room and the Hindu (Naina Devi) temple were scenes of labour with a view to diverting streams. At a quarter to two the landslide occurred burying those in and around the buildings mentioned above." The total number of dead and missing were 108 Indian and 43 British nationals. (See poem by Hannah Battersby on the page Literary references to Nainital). The Assembly Rooms and the Naina Devi Temple were both destroyed in the disaster. A recreation area known as 'The Flats' was later built on the site and a new temple was also erected. To prevent further disasters, storm water drains were constructed and building bylaws were made stricter.

By the 1880s, a mere 42 years after its founding, Nainital had become something of an exclusive English preserve, with the Indian presence in the town confined largely to a behind-the-scenes labour and service industry, or to the occasional prince. This state of affairs lasted for much of the Victorian era. The first signs of change came early in the 20th century, when Indian bureaucrats and professionals began arriving in town as part of the annual migration of the state government of the United Provinces to Nainital every summer, by 1901 its population had risen to 7609.

BARDIA NATIONAL PARK

The Royal Bardia National Park is the largest and most undisturbed wild area of the Terai region of the Nepal Himalayas. Similar to Chitwan park, but with a drier climate and a more remote location, Bardia encompasses 1,000-sq-kms of riverine grassland and sal forests.

The Terai or lowland hills and valleys of southern Nepal, nowhere over 1,000 feet in elevation, extend all along the Indian border. The Terai once supported a healthy wildlife population in a habitat of 25-foot high elephant grass and dense hardwood forests, but had very few people, due to virulent malarial mosquitos.

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 conveyed when the Rana rule ended in the 1950's. A well-meaning malaria eradication program in the 1950's and 1960's opened the terai for settlement, and transformed about 75% of the native Terai to agricultural land. Wildlife populations declined with the combination of increased settlement and widespread poaching. Bardia was declared a wildlife reserve in 1976, first measuring 134 sq miles and expanded in 1985 to 374 sq miles.



Today's Royal Bardia National Park is bordered to the south by the Babai River, to the north by the Shiwalik or Churia Hills, to the west by the Girwa River (a tributary of the Karnali), and to the east by a section of the East-West Highway which bisects the park. The Terai is only in the southwest corner of the park. Much of Bardia is on the southern slopes of the Shiwalik Range where the hills rise to over 4,000 feet.



What makes a visit to Nepal's Royal Bardia National Park particularly special is not just its large and intact habitat area and its isolated location, but also 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.

Bardia also boasts the greatest number of deer species in Nepal. The six deer species found in the park are: Chital or spotted Deer with its ubiquitous white spots on a brown coat;

Hog Deer; similar to but smaller than Chital; Sambhar, the largest Deer on Indian subcontinent with a shaggy coat and thick antlers; Swamp Deer; Barasingha; and reddish-colored Barking Deer, the park's smallest Deer.

Other large mammals are: Gaur, the largest wild oxen in world; wild Boar, an omnivorous black-coated creature with large tusks; the agile sloth Bear, a shaggy black bear with a distinctive white "V" on its chest; Blue Bull or Nilgai, the largest Antelope on the Indian subcontinent; and Himalayan Tahr. Serow and Goral, two goat-Antelope members, are also found. Small mammals include: Langur Monkey, Rhesus Macaque, Jackal, three species of cats (jungle, leopard, and fishing); yellow-throated Marten; Mongoose; and Indian Otter.

Two species of crocodiles swim in the Karnali, Girwa, and Babai Rivers - the blunt-snouted Marsh Mugger and the fish-eating gharial with its long thin snout. These creatures share the water with the fresh-water Gangetic Dolphin. The Karnali also supports the great mahseer, which weigh up to 90 lbs, an angler's prize catch.

LUMBINI

Lumbini is in the foothills of the Himalaya, where the Buddha is said to have lived till the age of 29. Kapilvastu is the name of the place in question as well as of the neighbouring district. Lumbini has a number of temples, including the Mayadevi temple, and others under construction. Also here is the Puskarini or Holy Pond - where the Buddha's mother took the ritual dip prior to his birth and where he, too, had his first bath - as well as the remains of Kapilvastu palace. At other sites near Lumbini, earlier Buddhas were, according to tradition, born, achieved ultimate awakening and finally relinquished earthly form.

In the Buddha's time, Lumbini was a park situated between Kapilavastu and Devadaha in India. It was there that the Buddha was born^[2]. A pillar now marks the spot of Asoka's visit to Lumbini. According to an inscription on the pillar, it was placed there by the people then in charge of the park to commemorate Asoka's visit and gifts^[3]. The park was previously known as Rummindei, two miles north of Bhagavanpura.

In the Sutta Nipáta (vs. 683) it is stated that the Buddha was born in a village of the Sákya, in the Lumbineyya Janapada. The Buddha stayed in Lumbinivana during his visit to Devadaha and there preached the Devadaha Sutta^[4].



In 1896, Nepalese archaeologists (effort by Khadga Samsher Rana) discovered a great stone pillar at the site, attributed to Emperor Ashoka. Records made by the Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian were also used in the process of identifying this religiously acclaimed site.



Lumbini, as of 1997, is an UNESCO World Heritage Site specifically nominated for the international World Heritage program.

The holy site of Lumbini is bordered by a large monastic

zone, in which only monasteries can be built, no shops or hotels or restaurants. It is separated into an eastern and western monastic zone, the eastern having the Theravadin monasteries, the western having Mahayana and Vajrayana monasteries.

The holy site of Lumbini has ruins of ancient monasteries, a sacred Bodhi tree, an ancient bathing pond, the Asokan pillar and the Mayadevi temple, where the precise place of birth of Buddha is located. From early morning to early evening, pilgrims from various countries perform chanting and meditation at the site.

POKHARA

Pokhara is situated in the northwestern corner of the Pokhara Valley, which is a widening of the Seti Gandaki valley. The Seti River and its tributaries have dug impressive canyons into the valley floor, which are only visible from higher viewpoints or from the air. To the east of Pokhara is the municipality of Lekhnath, a recently established town in the valley.



In no other place do mountains rise so quickly. In this area, within 30 km, the elevation rises from 1,000 m to over 7,500 m. Due to this sharp rise in altitude the area of Pokhara has one of the highest precipitation rates of the country (over 4,000 mm/year). Even within the city there is a noticeable difference in the amount of rain between the south of the city by the lake and the north at the foot of the mountains.

In the south the city borders on Phewa Tal (lake) (4.4 km² at an elevation of about 800 m above sea level), in the north at an elevation of around

1,000 m 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. In the 17th century it was part of the influential Kingdom of Kaski which again was one of the Chaubise Rajya (24 Kingdoms of Nepal) ruled by a branch of the Shah Dynasty. Many of the mountains around Pokhara still have medieval ruins from this time. In 1786 Prithvi Narayan Shah added Pokhara into his kingdom. It had by then become an important trading place on the routes from Kathmandu to Jumla and from India to Tibet.

From 1959 to 1962 some 300,000 refugees fled to Nepal from neighbouring Tibet after it was annexed by China. Four refugee camps were established in and around Pokhara: Tashipalkhel, Tashiling, Paljorling and Jambling. These camps have evolved into well built settlements, each with a gompa (Buddhist monastery), chorten and its particular architecture, and Tibetans have become a visible minority in the city.

After the annexation of Tibet by China that led to the Indo-China war the trading route to India became defunct. Today only few caravans from Mustang still arrive in Bagar.

Temples worth visiting in the older part of town are Bindhyabasini temple and Bhimsen temple. Another temple, Barahi temple, is located on an island in the Phewa lake, accessible only by boats.



On a hill overlooking Phewa Tal from the south is the World Peace Stupa (at 1,113 m) QTVR built in 1996 with a view of the lake, across the city and of the snow peaked mountain ranges of Manaslu, Annapurna and Dhaulagiri Himal.

The best viewpoint of Pokhara is **Sarangkot** (1,600 m) and Thulakot (in Lekhnath a part of famous Royal Trek from where four lakes Phewa, Begnas, Khaste and Dipang and 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 Sarangkot 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 and the cable cars. Many of them are not mentioned in guides or maps. The Seti Gandaki (White Gandaki) and its tributaries have created spectacular gorges in and around the whole city. 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.

In the middle of the city, the gorge widens to a canyon looking like a crater. In the north and south, just outside town, the rivers created canyons, in some places 100 m deep. These canyons extend through the whole Pokhara Valley. Viewpoints are not easy to find. One place is the Prithvi Narayan Campus and the other side at the foot of Kahu Danda, where several rivers and canyons join. Behind the INF-Compound (Tundikhel) one can see the Seti River disappear into a small slit of a wall about 30 metres high which is especially impressive in monsoon. Betulechaur in the far north of Pokhara is known for the musicians caste of the Gain

SARANGKOT

Sarangkot 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.

At an altitude of 1592 meters, this mountain sits north of Pokhara overlooking the valley and Fewa Tal. Just a short 2 hour scenic trek through small villages and jungle from the main tourist area of Pokhara, or a 45 minute taxi ride.

Sarangkot is a beautiful village best known for its sunrise, where on a clear day you can see an unobstructed view of the Himalayan mountains of Annapurna rang, Dhauligiri, Fishtail.

Another main attraction to Sarangkot is to spend an hour in the sky paragliding with fantastic views of the mountains and the city below.

To experience true Nepali culture take a 3 hour tour around Sarangkot and meet the locals and see how they live.

KATHMANDU



Kathmandu is the largest city and capital of [Nepal](#) and the namesake of the [Kathmandu Valley](#). As a result of considerable urban growth in recent decades, it is now part of one

It is possible to get across the city by foot, but it is not always a pleasant walk and you may want to consider a rickshaw for anything more than wandering around a specific area.

Rickshaws are bicycle driven; the motorized ones have been banned from the valley in a bid to check rising pollution. Rickshaws can hardly be found outside the tourist area of Thamel, however, since they are mostly only used by the tourists. Negotiate on a price before you get in, if you can't

agree, just look for another driver. Prices go up after dark and in less busy areas. Taxis are easy to find; they park near all major streets and have fare-meters.

Things to See

Swayambhu - 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 no lack of monkeys. It's a 20-30 minute walk from Thamel, or take a taxi or rickshaw. Pay Rs 100 (Rs.200 as of July 2010) to enter at the front steps or slip in free on the ramp on the south side. As with the Boudha Stupa, there's no shortage of Buddhist and Tibetan-inspired trinkets for sale. There are also drinks for sale at the top, and at least one small restaurant selling momos. For those that have their own transport or have difficulty climbing stairs there is a parking lot at the back entrance that significantly reduces the amount of stairs that need to be climbed to gain access to the main compound.

Baudha Stupa in [Baudha](#). 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, entrance fee is 500 NRS for foreigners. Giant fruit bats hanging from the tall trees and 20 foot-tall bamboo around the otherwise modern (and still well secured) former palace are a sight-- especially around sunset when they depart en masse.

Thamel Chowk - lots of restaurants and shops.

Freak Street - Historic home of western hippies seeking enlightenment, but now just a few restaurants and hotels.

Nasal Chowk Statues, temples and the Rana museum.

Pashupatinath - An important temple to Shiva in the form of Lord of Animals. See monkeys, cremation, sadhus and a holy cave. Morning is a great time to go.

Garden of Dreams - Relax in this beautiful and peaceful walled garden close to the former Royal Palace. Entry Rs 160.

Durbar Square, Kathmandu

The heart of Kathmandu this ancient square 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. This site is the most popular UNESCO World Heritage Site in Nepal.

Magical in the very early morning and evening, Durbar Square can be an exhausting experience due to the overwhelming number of young men offering to be "guides." Be firm with saying "no" if you are not interested, but realize that looking at a map, or even standing still for a moment will be an invitation to a dozen other would-be "helpers". Ask at the Tourist Information Office at the entrance if you do want a guide. A place not to be missed is a visit to Kathmandu Durbar Square Museum.

HETAUDA

Located within the district of **Makawanpur** and the area zone of Narayani lies a small town by the name of **Hetauda**, which is based in the center of Nepal. Some feel that the town is in that specific location due to the meeting points of two of the most influential highways: Tribhuwan Rajpath and the East-West Highway. Just a hundred and thirty-two kilometers away from here you will find the [capital of Nepal, Kathmandu](#), which can be accessed via the Tribhuwan Highway or along two of the new alternate roads less than eighty kilometers, though be warned they are still in a rough state as construction has not been fully completed.

Surrounding the town of Hetauda are three rivers: Rapti lies in the west, Samari in the north and in the south is Karra. The rivers run through in a southwest direction, finally meeting up one of the biggest rivers, the Narayani. It is here that you'll find one of the most important industrial regions in all of Nepal. Although this is so, it is highly regarded for being one of the cleanest and possibly the greenest cities in Nepal. There are many other features which make Hetauda incredibly popular for those who migrate out of the hilly regions located in the north and south. It is also blessed with a wonderful climate. Hetauda is surrounded by two distinct [mountain ranges](#): the Mahabharata range, which lies in the north, and in the south the Siwalik range.



Hetauda has a lot of potential to become one of the most influential commercial powerhouses within Nepal that could greatly benefit the area in the future. From the bordering city of Birgunj in Nepal, you will take approximately an hour to reach Hetauda along Kathmandu's Tribhuwan highway and of course the East-west

Highway, or as its also known the 'Mahendra Highway'. Some of the popular industries that you can find located in this area are found in the Hetauda Industrial District (HID), which houses some of the largest industries as well as sheltering some of the medium and small-scale industries within the country.



Most of the people who live in Hetauda do so because of being employed by the government or the large industries and so it can be said that a large extent of the population are from the working-class. There is, however, individual entrepreneurs who favor the transport sector, making trucking a very popular [business](#).

Nevertheless, Hetauda abounds in attractions from the Martyr Memorial Park, built in honor of the Nepalese martyrs, to the Makwanpur Gadhi, a fort with immense historic importance going all the way back to the Nepalese Unification process. All in all Hetauda is an exiting town with great potential for the future and well worth the visit.

DHARAN

At the east of Nepal, right at the foot of hills, at an altitude of 1148 ft (349m) lies this beautiful city, Dharan. Beautiful roads, remarkable homes and natural beauty aren't all that makes Dharan. It embraces cleanliness, openness, friendly hill people and their smiles. Dharan grew after British setup the 'Gurkha Recruitment Center' in 1953, which helped many Nepalese earn employment. Two ethnic groups namely Rais and Limbus used to constitute the major portion of Gurkha soldiers. These groups came from the eastern region of Nepal, and Dharan was their center for training.

Dharan has a tropical monsoon climate with maximum temperature of 35 to 36 Degree Celsius in April, and minimum of 10 to 12 Degree Celsius in January. The maximum rainfall is about 460mm which is usually seen in August. Nepal's one of the largest river, Saptakoshi, runs near Dharan.

Places to Visit and Things to do in Dharan

Sightseeing : Temples

Dharan is one of the holy places of Nepal. It has numerous temples; Pindeshwar temple, Dantakali temple, Pancha Kanyan temple, and Buddha Subba temple. Many Hindu pilgrims visit holi temples located in this region as well as those located in other parts of Makwanpur District of Nepal



Heavenly Drink!

Drink Tongba : In Dharan and also in north of Dharan, find a special *Limbu* culture of drink known as Tongba, which is another name for Limbu's homemade wine. Fermented millet seeds are put in a wooden or plastic mug which is filled with hot water. One sips through a bamboo straw as more hot water is added which makes Tongba go down easily and has more influence. Many consume this drink during winter season, and is also a favorite drink of the domestic tourists in the region.

Sightseeing of Bhedetar - The Mountain Views

Bhedetar is located 9 Kilometer away from Dharan. When the sky is clear (especially during Autumn season), one can witness magnificent views of the Himalayan range, and enjoy fresh Himalayan breeze.

Sightseeing : Pakhri Bash

Small hill village which had the British base camp built to Recruit Gurkha Army. Some British monuments can be found here.

Dhankuta / Hile - Tea Gardens and Bazaar

From Dharan, about 50 Kilometers of what is the most scenic drive in Nepal takes you to a place where your imagination of greenery gardens are revealed. Some say, come to Dhankuta, if you want to walk in the clouds. Meet the clouds, village folks, and greet the awesome enchanting tea gardens here, and learn some on organic tea and tea processing units in Nepal. If you are a tea lover, you will enjoy visiting a privately owned tea garden and factory named Guranse. Also visit Hile, a hill town situated at 1850 meter altitude, which is just 6 Kilometer from Dhankuta for the Hile Bazaar and gracious people.

BIRATNAGAR

Biratnagar is Nepal's second biggest city that is located at the southeastern border to India. For years, this city in the Tarai region has been linked with cheap Chinese and Japanese electronics products. Lately, the city has turned itself as one of the largest commercial and industrial hub in Nepal. In a way, it is a transit point for all kinds of legal and illegal trades with India. The very few manufacturing industry that Nepal has, is located in an around Biratnagar. It also acts as a way for tourists to get entry in to Indian hill stations such as Gangtok and Darjeeling. From there, the mountaineers and hikers proceed for Kanchanjunga, the second highest Himalayan Peak. It is also a gateway to the Tea estates of Nepal that are confined in the districts of Illam and Dhankuta. Biratnagar has also evolved itself to become the melting pot for the various religions and cultures in the Tarai. The place is known for its vibrant culture activities.



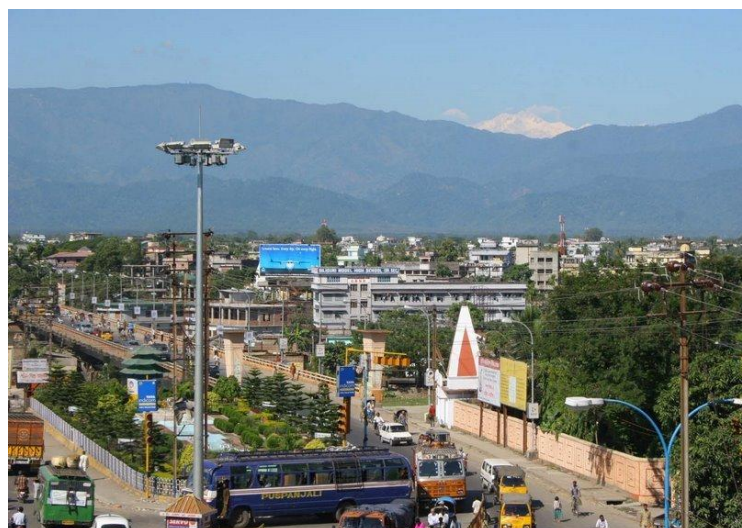
Among the places worth visiting, Kosi Tappa is your best bet. The place is just 2-hours drive from the heart of the city. This wetland is heaven for the birdwatchers and runs almost parallel to the Sapta Kosi River and attracts a lot of migratory birds. In fact, it is one of the best wetlands in Asia in terms of number of species of birds they attract. Close to this place is the Kosi barrage. This is the largest barrage in Nepal and a bone of contention with its neighbor, India. The spectacle of thundering Kosi, river finding its way to India, is breathtaking.

Baraha Chhetra is another must visit site in Biratnagar. This Hindu pilgrimage site is situated at the confluence of Koka and Sapta Kosh rivers. It will take a 20 minutes walk to reach to the temple site. The front pedestal of the temple gives a magnificent view of the riverside. The place is very popular among the locals for taking the holy dip. It is popularly believed that the devil Hirayankashyapu was slayed on this very spot. Apart from that, don't forget to visit the weekly haat (Communal Market) that is organized on Wednesday at the downtown Biratnagar.

SILIGURI

Siliguri, for some it is the main commercial city of North Bengal and for some its importance comes from its strategic placement near international and state borders. But most of all Siliguri is blessed with the beauty of nature. The town of Siliguri is an important transportation, trading and educational center which is situated on the banks of the river Mahananda and spreaded in the foot hill of Eastern Himalaya.

Look behind just a century ago, Siliguri was nothing but a small village with more small population. Agriculture was the only occupation of the dwellers of then Siliguri. 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 center. But today Siliguri has achieved the position of



second largest city in the West Bengal with a population of 1,22,0275 (according to 2001 census) Going further ahead Siliguri is now considered as one of the fastest growing in the country.

The Geo strategic importance of the town Siliguri is unforgettable. Siliguri connects three international borders (Bangladesh, China, and Nepal) which is rare evidence on the map of the world. Siliguri is joined with Kalimpong (Kalimpong) and Sikkim by road and there is rail connections with Darjeeling (Darjeeling) and Jalpaiguri. Being so located, Siliguri became a trade hub for the whole West Bengal. An important nerve center of all kinds of activities related to the trade and commerce of the region. Siliguri is occupying a leading position in all type of business. Today whether production or agriculture or service, at every sector Siliguri is establishing its strong base. Saw milling and jute milling are important industries over here; there are also tea plantations in the main importance. The population of the city Siliguri along with its surrounding areas has crossed a million and still growing at a fast speed.

Siliguri is a paradise of scenic beauty marinating wonderful balance between industrial state and ecology of the reign. Siliguri attracts the tourist of far and away with its immense natural beauty of the place. Siliguri is the center for a number of shopping malls and considered as a place for variety of foreign goods. With a perfect blend of ethnicity and modernism Siliguri can perfectly describe as a shoppers' heaven.

Being located at a great international and national position Siliguri contains a mixture of different people, religions, cultures and languages. Ranjbongshi people were originally owned most of the land of Siliguri is now decreasing with times. Marwaris', Punjabis', Biharis', Gorkhas' and Bengalis are now the most prominent communities here in Siliguri. Hindi, Marwari, Bengali and Nepali are the commonly spoken regional languages at Siliguri.

Without any doubt Siliguri is a dream location for many people and number of Siliguri obsessed people are growing with every second of the time.

DARJEELING

Darjeeling is in a small city in [West Bengal, India](#).

Originally just a cluster of villages that was administered intermittently by [Nepal](#) and [Sikkim](#), Darjeeling grew in prominence during the mid 19th century when, because of its climate, the British first established a hill station there after leasing it from the Chogyal of [Sikkim](#) and later discovered that the area was particularly 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 (it is now a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#)) and the town became the de-facto summer capital of India during the days when the Raj was governed from [Calcutta](#).

Because it was a popular hill station during the days of the Raj, a lovely Victorian town was built among the



Himalayan foothills, the remnants of which are still visible around the Chowrasta and Darjeeling remains a popular summer and fall resort for the natives of [Kolkata](#) today. For foreign tourists, 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 Nepali and Bihari laborers brought to work in the tea plantations), the beautiful views (including the wonderful vista view of Kanchenjunga), a variety of trekking options, and the opportunity to cool down after a stint in the plains. The town is also a jumping off point for travelers heading to Sikkim.

There has been intermittent political action from Gorkha groups demanding an independent state (Gorkhaland). In June 2008 a strike paralyzed the area, with closed hotels, restaurants and shops, and the accompanying protests even turned violent a couple of times. Though inconvenient, tourists generally are not at risk, but recently they do check the status before going there

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute(HMI), [2]. This is one of the most visited spot in Darjeeling. This institute was created by the late Tenzing Norgay. He was a Sherpa who climbed the Mount Everest on 29th of May 1953 with Sir Edmund Hillary. All the equipments used in that climb are still a highlight in that institute.

Himalayan Zoo (*Padmaja Naidu Zoological Park*), (*shares the premises of HMI*). It has a good collection of animals found in the Himalayan region.

Tiger Hill - Ideal to visit early morning when the first rays of the sun kiss the Mt Kanchenjunga and give it a golden color. To visit the hill, one needs to get up at 3:00AM in the morning. You can taste some excellent tea on your way to the hill, which will provide much needed warmth on cold Darjeeling mornings.



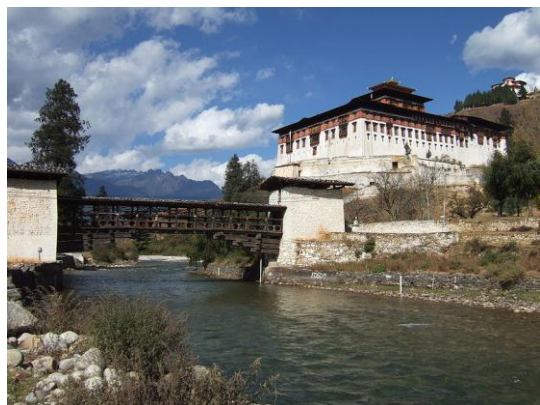
Observatory Hill: Observatory hill is the oldest site in Darjeeling. This hill is also known as the “Makal-Babu-Ko-Thaan” in local area. It is said that a Red Hat Buddhist Monastery stood at this very spot. Nepal people destroyed this monastery in the 19th century

The **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR)** 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

Paro is the name of a district, valley, river and town (population 20,000) in the Kingdom of Bhutan. 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
- Kyichu Lhakhang, which along with Jambay Lhakhang in central Bhutan is the oldest temple in Bhutan, dating to the 7th century
- Drukgyel Dzong, at the upper end of the valley, built to protect against invading Tibetans, but in ruins since a fire in the 1950s.
- Paro Town, the single market town in the dzongkhag which is booming (by Bhutanese standards) due to an influx of tourist dollars.
- Rinjung Dzong, also known as **Paro Dzong**, the massive fortress/monastery which is also the administrative center of the dzongkhag. Scenes from the movie *Little Buddha* were filmed in and around this dzong.
- The National Museum of Bhutan, where visitors can learn about the culture of Bhutan.



Rinpung Dzong a fortress-monastery overlooking the Paro valley has a long history. A monastery was first built on the site by Padma Sambhava at the beginning of the tenth century, but it wasn't until 1646 that Ngawang Namgyal built a larger monastery on the old foundations, and for centuries this imposing five storey building served as an effective defence against numerous invasion attempts by the Tibetans.



Built with stones instead of clay, the Dzong was named Rinpung, meaning "heaps of jewels" but Rinpung and all its treasures were destroyed by the fire in 1907. Only one thangka, known as Thongdel, was saved. The Paro Dzong was rebuilt by the penlop dwa Penjor after the fire. Housed within its walls is a collection of sacred masks and costumes. Some date back several centuries; others were contributed by Dawa Penjor and his successor Penlop Tshering Penjor in recent times.

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

medieval bridge below the Dzong stands the Ugyenpelri Palace, a royal residence constructed by penlop Tshering Penjor.

Along the main street there is a complex of traditional architecture with richly decorated buildings housing small shops, institutions and restaurants.

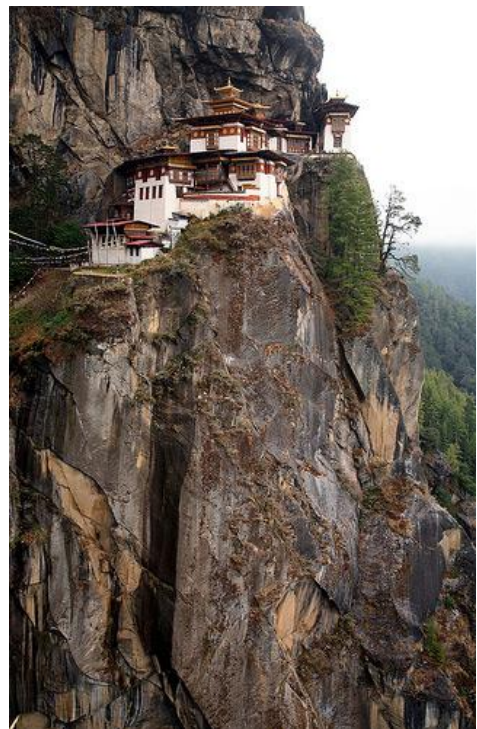
The Duntse Lhakhang is a 15th century temple situated by the new bridge, and the Ugyen Perli Palace is visible through the fence. Members of royal family lodge in the palace when passing. Nearby is the old bridge by the Rinpung Dzong. Notable hotels include the Olathang Hotel built in an ornate style.

TIGER'S NEST DZONG AT PARO

To an admirer of Buddhist architecture, the first thing that comes to mind is a pagoda or a Buddhist monastery. One such fascinating Buddhist wonder spots is the **Taktshang Monastery** in **Bhutan** that stands precariously at the edge of a cliff over 2,300 feet above the base of Paro valley. Built in 1692, this monastery is one of **the most holy religious spots of Bhutan**. The word 'Taktshang' translates to "Tigers Nest" and there is a curious legend behind how and why this series of thirteen hanging monasteries got such an interesting name.

The legend behind the construction of the Taktshang Monastery dates back to the 8th century and relates to the real historical figure of Guru Rinpoche or Padmasambhava. He is revered as the second Buddha because of his major contribution in the spread of Buddhism from Tibet to Bhutan. Bequeathed with miraculous powers in the eyes of common devotees, Guru Rinpoche is said to have traveled from place to place in the company of tantric and dakini consorts, vanquishing demons.

Yeshe Tsogyal the former wife of an Emperor joined his group and willingly became a flying tigress to bear the guru to the cliff top of Bhutan where the Taktshang Monastery presently stands. One of



the caves became the meditation spot for Guru Rinpoche who came out with his eight manifestations and later it was venerated as the holy spot for the monastery that thus derived its strange name.

The original construction of the Tigers Nest Monastery has an equally interesting tale behind it. It is said that notwithstanding the sheer cliff face where Guru Rinpoche decided to land, the air-borne dakinis bore building material on their backs to facilitate the construction process. It remained a place of worship for the people and stood sturdily through the fire damages of April 19, 1998. The Bhutan government took extensive steps to restore it in its original glory by referring back to ancient pictures and other testimonials. It took years of toil and perseverance until the renovation was completed in 2005.

Today you can visit all the temples of the Taktshang Monastery standing at an altitude of 10,200 feet. However, prior to the ascending the slope on mule-back or foot, as a non-Bhutanese you require a special permit and a guide for the venture. Once you begin the trek, you can experience the close touch of nature in the woodland leading to the ascending slope with interspersing sound of a bell. However, if you are not used to walking for rough stretches on mountainous paths, you will do best to take a horse or a mule.

You have to be patient through your trek to catch the first glimpse of the much-coveted monastery, for you cannot see anything for the major part of the trek because of the interposing vegetation. Look out for the small prayer wheel as when you reach it, you can see what your eyes were thirsting for. When you reach up to the cafeteria viewpoint, the vision will get clearer and get provisions for rest and refreshment. From this point, you must ready yourself to climb a series of stone steps, cross a waterfall and accept the difference between what the monastery looked from a distance and what it really looks when you actually get there.

What is remarkable about the **Tigers Nest Monastery** is the variation of the four temples that appear different from one another. 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. You must rest sufficiently and save some energy for the journey back. If you had covered the monastery-wards journey on foot, the second half of it can get particularly fatiguing. Yet the charm of the Taktshang Monastery is such that you will want to come back repeatedly.

THIMPU

Thimphu is Bhutan's capital city. The population of Thimphu is estimated to be 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. Vehicles first appeared on the streets a year later, and slowly the city began to adapt to its role as the nation's capital. Currently the town is undergoing massive development. New tree-lined streets are being laid and the clock tower area in the center of the city has been transformed into a park-cum-open air theater where live cultural performances take place. In 2008, the national stadium was completed together with a new river-side park. The area around the dzong and government buildings is a particularly green and an attractive district.

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 nailless wooden frames. Among its sights are the Memorial Chorten (dedicated to the king's late father Jigme Dorji Wangchuck) and the Tashicho Dzong a 350-year-old structure built by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and 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 monk body. Next to the Dzong is Thimphu's only golf course.

Also in town are the Changgankha Monastery and the early-17th-century Simtokha Dzong (fortress-turned-university of the Buddhist studies).

Shop for local crafts at the multilevel Government Handicraft Emporium (where you can also cash traveler's checks) or at one of several privately run emporiums (Choeki Handicrafts is a good choice for its wide selection and reasonable prices). Budding painters and sculptors can be seen at work at the National Art School and tours to the National Library Jungshi Paper Factory and Royal Academy of Performing Arts are rewarding cultural experiences.

In the center of town, stop at Swiss Bakery for pastries and Ambient Cafe in R.Penjom Lodge for freshly brewed coffees

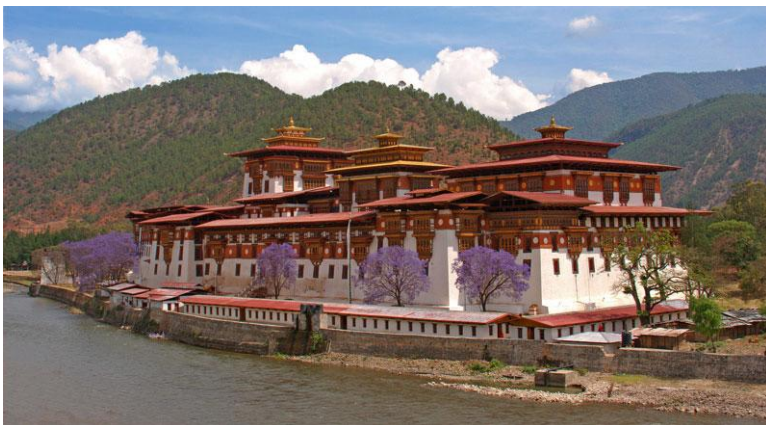
and innovative snacks.

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

Punakha, a former capital of Bhutan, is located in the west of the country.

Punakha was the capital of Bhutan until the 1960's, and still retains the serene atmosphere of a place with a regal past. The dzong is the main attraction, but there are also other sites of interest in and around this pleasant little town. Along with Paro and Jakar, Punakha completes the triangle of most popular tourist destinations.



The Punakha Dzong was constructed by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1637-38. It is the winter home of Bhutan's Central Monastic Body led by HH the Je Khenpo. The Dzong houses the most sacred relics of the Southern Drukpa Kagyu school including the Rangjung Kasarpani, and the sacred remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Tertön Padma Lingpa.

In 1907, Punakha Dzong was the site of the coronation of Ugyen Wangchuck (or Deb Nagpo) as 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 (GLOF). According to a recent report, flash flood damage to Punakha Dzong occurred in 1957, 1960 and 1994.^[1] Currently (March 2010) work is in progress to protect the dzong from future flood damage by deepening the river channels and raising the embankments using four large steam shovels.

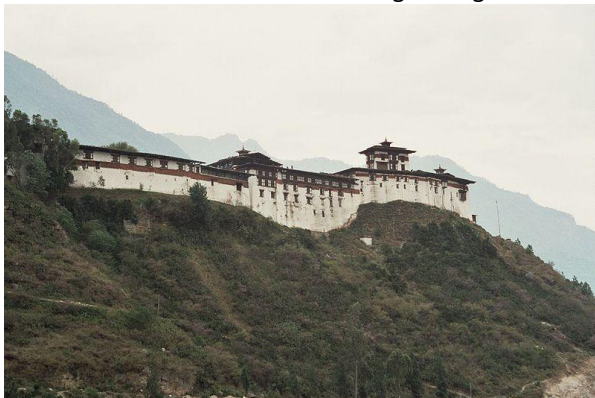
A covered wooden cantilever bridge crossing the Mo Chhu river was built together with the Dzong in the 17th century. This bridge was washed away by a flash flood in 1957 or 1958. In 2006 work started on a new covered wooden cantilever bridge of traditional construction with a free span of 55 meters which was completed in 2008.^[2]



WANGDUE PHODRANG

Wangdue Phodrang is a town and capital of Wangdue Phodrang District in central Bhutan.

The town 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".



Cranes (*grus nigricollis*) may be found.

There are three paved roads in Wangdue Phodrang dzongkhag. The Lateral Road enters from the west at Dochu La Pass, crosses the Pana Tsang Chhu at Wangdue Phodrang dzong, and continues east to Tongsa. One spur road heads north from Wangdue Phodrang to the dzong at Punakha and slightly beyond. This becomes the footpath to Gasa. A second spur departs the Lateral Road near the Pele La pass halfway between Wangdue and Tongsa, traveling south a short distance to Gangteng Gonpa and the Phobjika valley where the rare Black-necked

CHUZOMSA

Nine kilometress east from Wangdiphodrang at Chuzomsa, is located Kichu Resort, Wangdue.

Overlooking the Dang chu river at an elevation of 5000 ft, the Resort basks amidst alpine scenery.

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

TRONGSA

In the centre of the Bhutan and four hours by drive from Wangdue Phodrang, Trongsa offers a welcome rest to travelers. The approach to the town involves a trip around Trongsa valley. A vantage point from the opposite side of the valley, still 14 kms from Trongsa, provides an exciting view of the Dzong and the town.



The secular and religious centre, the Dzong, dominates the horizon, dwarfing the surrounding buildings.

The royal family's ancestral home is Trongsa. Both his majesty king Ugyen Wangchuk, the Penlop of Trongsa, who was elected the country's first hereditary monarch, and his successor king Jigme Wangchuk, ruled the country from Trongsa's ancient Dzong. The crown prince of Bhutan normally holds the position of the Trongsa Penlop prior to the ascending to the throne - the present king continued this tradition as he appointed Trongsa Penlop in 1972 shortly before he ascended

the Throne of Bhutan.

Trongsa Dzong is an impregnable fortress. The Dzong itself is a labyrinth of temples, corridors and offices holding court over the local community. It is built on many levels into the side of the hill and can be seen from every approach to Trongsa, heralding its strength as a defensive stronghold.

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.

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. Constructed in 1644, it 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 Dzong. Constructed in 1644 and located on the top of an imposing hill, this dzong creates an impressive sight for miles around.

Thrupang Palace. The palace was built by the second king and was the birth place of the third. Currently it used by reigning monarchs when on official visits to Trongsa. The building is closed to the public and like many of the early palaces is unimposing, but from an architectural and historical point of view it is still worth viewing

JAKAR

Spacious and surrounded by tree covered mountains, the valley in which Jakar is located (Choekor Valley) is considered to be one of the most beautiful in all Bhutan, and it is commonly referred to as "Little Switzerland". The Jakar area is known as a bastion of Vajrayana Buddhism, especially the Nyingma tradition, 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. The main bazaar is currently a row of single storey buildings. However, due to the danger of the nearby river, this will soon be replaced by a new row of two storey shops currently under construction near the dzong.

Jakar Dzong. The fortress 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, the palace 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. Currently, it is unoccupied and can be visited.

Kurje Lhakhang (also Kurjey). 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

Mongar is a town near Bumthang. The seven-hour drive from Bumthang to Mongar takes you through one of the most spectacular roads carved into vertical cliffs, spectacular waterfalls and lush vegetation of Bhutan. 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:- It 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.

Lhuentse (2,323m/7,621ft):- Lhuentse is 77 km. from Mongar (3 hours drive) and is one of the most isolated districts in Bhutan. The landscape is spectacular, with stark cliffs towering above river gorges and dense coniferous forests. The region is famous for its weavers, and their distinctive textiles are generally considered to be the best in the country. The Kurtoe region of Lhuentse is also the ancestral home of the monarchy.

TRASHIGANG

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 Ngaloops of central and western Bhutan appear to be mainly Tibetan.

Trashigang dzongkhag has the densest population in Bhutan. It used to be part of an important trade route connecting Assam to Tibet, and still is a primary route for Bhutanese trade with India. Major towns include **Trashigang, Radhi, Rangjung, and Phongmey.** The district produces a lot of rice and lavender.

Trashigang dzongkhag is also the site of Sherubtse College, the original college within the Royal University of Bhutan system.

Trashigang Dzong

Trashigang Dzong, or fortress, was built in 1659 by the third Druk Desi Chögyal Mingyur Tenpa 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

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

Rangjung

Rangjung, 16 km east of the district capital, is the site of Rangjung Ösel Chöling Monastery, established by Dungse Garab Dorje Rinpoche in 1989. The temple contains particularly fine images of Padmasambhava, Shantarakshita and Chögyal Trisong Detsen (Khen-Lop-Chö sum).

SAMDRUP JONGKHAR

This town is small and bustling and acts as a commercial hub and entry and exit point in the south east for the scenic drive and the few places while driving from Trashigang. The primary reason for driving to Samdrup Jongkhar would be to reach the nearest airport at Guwahati. En route you will stop at the Zangdo Pelri Temple, School for the Blind, Khaling Weaving Centre and finally at Dewathang. 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.

The district of Samdrup Jongkhar is one of the 20 dzongkhag (districts) comprising Bhutan.

Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag lies in the South Eastern part of Bhutan bordering the Indian State of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Dzongkhag has a total area of approximately 2,308 square kilometers and major portions of the Dzongkhag fall within the subtropical belt



with elevations ranging from 200-3,500 metres above sea level.

Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag comprises of three Drungkhags viz Bhangtar, Daifam and Nganglam and ten gewogs namely; Orong, Gomdar, Martshala, Bakuli, Dechhenling, Norbugang, Dalim and Samrang, Lauri, Serthi and Hastinapur with about 5,016 households.

Due to lack of adequate motorable road network, most places remain isolated and remote. Rugged terrain and scattered settlements make delivery of services difficult and costly.

GUWAHATI

Guwahati is the largest city in Assam, Northeast India. It used to be the capital before it moved to the planned city of Dispur.

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 center for shopping and business, attracting people from all over the north east as well as from Eastern Bhutan. 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. Still, despite the weak infrastructure, private investors have been drawn to the city in recent years and there has been something of a boom in the construction of shopping malls and high quality condominiums, which has helped raise the economic profile of the city.

If you can not go on the river cruise, at least cross the river on the ferry. Ferries provide transport to the local people - they leave the jetty at Fancy bazar every half an hour and the round trip will take around 45 minutes. Tickets are rs.3/- one way. It's a simple way to enjoy the scenic beauty of the river Brahmaputra

Uma Nanda Temple, A 17th century temple dedicated to Shiva. Umananda temple is on an island in the middle of the Brahmaputra river-Peacock island. You need to take a boat to reach the island. You can get a shared boat or reserve the entire boat for yourself. You will get boats from fancy bazaar Ghat near the Sukreshwar temple. From the island you will get a good view of the riverside. Those who love nature can spend some time here just watching the Brahmaputra flow around the island.

