



Western Bhutan

Includes »

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| PARO DZONGKHAG .. | 72 |
| Paro | 72 |
| Around Paro | 80 |
| Paro to Thimphu | 85 |
| HAA DZONGKHAG ... | 86 |
| Haa | 87 |
| PUNAKHA DZONGKHAG | 89 |
| Punakha & Khuruthang | 91 |
| WANGDUE PHODRANG DZONGKHAG | 95 |
| Wangdue Phodrang | 95 |
| Phobjikha Valley | 98 |
| CHHUKHA DZONGKHAG | 100 |
| Phuentsholing | 103 |

Best Places to Stay

- » Gangtey Palace (p77)
- » Dewachen Hotel (p99)
- » Kichu Resort (p97)

Best Places to Eat

- » Sonam Trophel Restaurant (p79)
- » Bukhari Restaurant (p79)
- » Phuenzhi Diner (p95)

Why Go?

Whether you arrive by air at the lovely Paro valley or by road at tropical Phuentsholing, your first impression of Bhutan is one of stepping into a world that you had only hoped existed. Vertical prayer flags flutter in the breeze and men dressed in a traditional *gho* (tunic) and Argyle socks stroll past yellow-roofed shrines and wooden slate-roofed houses. It soon becomes clear that you have arrived somewhere quite special.

The West is the region of Bhutan that most tourists see and for good reason. It's the heartland of the Drukpa people and is home to the only airport, the capital, the most popular festivals and the largest, oldest and most spectacular dzongs (monastic forts) in the kingdom. Throw in the country's most popular treks, lots of scope to get off the beaten track and minimal driving times and the appeal is obvious. Whether it's the beginning of your trip or the only part of Bhutan that you have time to see, it's a spectacular introduction to a magical land.

When to Go

September to November are great months to visit Bhutan. You'll get great weather, clear mountain views from Dochu La and dramatic festivals at Thimphu and Wangdue Phodrang. Black-necked cranes arrive in the Phobjikha valley in late October and early November. March and April are also popular, with the Paro tsechu a major draw, as lovely spring rhododendron blooms carpet the hillsides.

Western Bhutan Highlights

- 1 Visit the beautiful dzong at **Punakha** (p91), the capital of Bhutan from the 17th to the 19th centuries
- 2 Take a crash course in Bhutanese culture and history at Paro's **National Museum** (p73)
- 3 Spot black-necked cranes or do some great hiking in the remote, glacial **Phobjikha valley** (p98)
- 4 Hike uphill to the dramatic cliff-hanging **Tiger's Nest** (Taktshang Goemba; p82), Bhutan's most famous sight
- 5 Make the pilgrimage to the **Kyichu Lhakhang** (p80), one of Bhutan's oldest and most beautiful temples
- 6 Explore remote monasteries and timeless hermitages in the little-visited **Haa valley** (p87)
- 7 Be blessed with a 10-inch penis, if only for a day, at **Chimi Lhakhang** (p91), the monastery of the Divine Madman!

