



Central Bhutan

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Why Go?

Central Bhutan's forested mountains and fertile valleys comprise the country's cultural heartland. The region boasts several of Bhutan's oldest and most significant temples and monasteries, dozens of great day hikes and several spectacular festivals.

Across the 3420m-high Pele La and the Black Mountains is the magnificent and historically important Trongsa Dzong, commanding the junction of three major roads. From Trongsa, a short, steep drive over the Yotong La (3425m) leads to the four valleys of Bumthang, a magical region of saints and treasure-seekers, great demon-subduing struggles and fabulous miracles, rich with relics, hermitages and sacred sites from the visits of Guru Rinpoche and Pema Lingpa.

Central Bhutan sees fewer tourists than western Bhutan, though Bumthang's new airport looks set to change this. To really get off the beaten track head south to Zhemgang to visit remote village lhakhangs and the almost unexplored Royal Manas National Park.

When to Go

- ➔ Central Bhutan, particularly the fertile valleys of Bumthang, is a year-round destination: pleasant in summer, and ideal in spring (especially for the rhododendron displays on the mountain passes) and autumn.
- ➔ Winters can be cold, especially in Bumthang, but days are normally sunny and there are few tourists – just bring some warm clothes and don't be surprised if the passes are closed by snow for a day or two.
- ➔ Ideally you should time your visit to include at least one of the colourful and fascinating festivals, such as at Ura, Trongsa Dzong, Jampey Lhakhang or Kurjey Lhakhang.



Central Bhutan Highlights

- 1 Explore sprawling **Trongsa Dzong** (p114), a dramatic example of traditional Bhutanese architecture
- 2 Discover the heritage of Trongsa at the **Tower of Trongsa Royal Heritage Museum** (p116)
- 3 Take one of many hikes in the **Bumthang valleys** (p126)
- 4 Wander around the **Kurjey Lhakhang** (p127) complex, a legacy of Guru Rinpoche
- 5 Visit one of Bhutan's oldest and most significant temples at **Jampey Lhakhang** (p124)
- 6 Circumambulate **Tamshing Goemba** (p129) wearing a cloak of chainmail made by Pema Lingpa
- 7 Pause for a picnic at **Chendebji Chorten** (p113), patterned after Swayambhunath in Kathmandu
- 8 Detour up the Tang valley to the superb museum of the 100-year-old **Ogyen Chholing Palace** (p131)