



Thimphu

02 / POP 95,100 / ELEV 2320M

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Best Places to Eat

- Seasons Restaurant (p64)
- Ambient Café (p63)
- The Zone (p63)
- Bhutan Kitchen (p63)

Best Places to Stay

- Druk Hotel (p62)
- Hotel Jumolhari (p61)
- Taj Tashi (p62)
- Hotel Pedling (p61)

Why Go?

The capital of one of the world's most intriguing destinations, Thimphu has all but shrugged off the friendly village tag. The city buzzes with a commercial exuberance that constantly challenges the country's natural conservatism and Shangri La image. Vehicle traffic, unheard of a handful of years ago, now courses through the ever-growing road network nourishing a construction boom. However, the juxtapositions of old and new remain part of Thimphu's charm. Crimson-robed monks, Indian labourers, government ministers clad in *ghos* and *kiras* (traditional dress) and camera-wielding tourists all share the pot-holed pavements.

For the visitor Thimphu offers the best opportunity to briefly break away from the tour itinerary. In addition to its traditional Buddhist sights and attractions, it offers cafes, bars, nightclubs and restaurants. Finding a balance between the esoteric and espresso – the old and the new – is the key to getting the most out of this captivating city.

When to Go

- The improving autumn weather, clear skies and the colourful and exciting Thimphu *dromchoe* and tsechu festivities make September to November the peak season, when flight and accommodation bookings can be tight.
- In spring the rhododendrons in the surrounding hills erupt in blossom and the Je Khenpo leads the annual procession of monks from Punakha to their summer residence in Thimphu.
- Saturday is a good day to be in the city throughout the year, with archery tournaments, expanded opening hours at the dzong, the Weekend Market and the liveliest nightlife, though some sights and all government offices are closed.

Sights

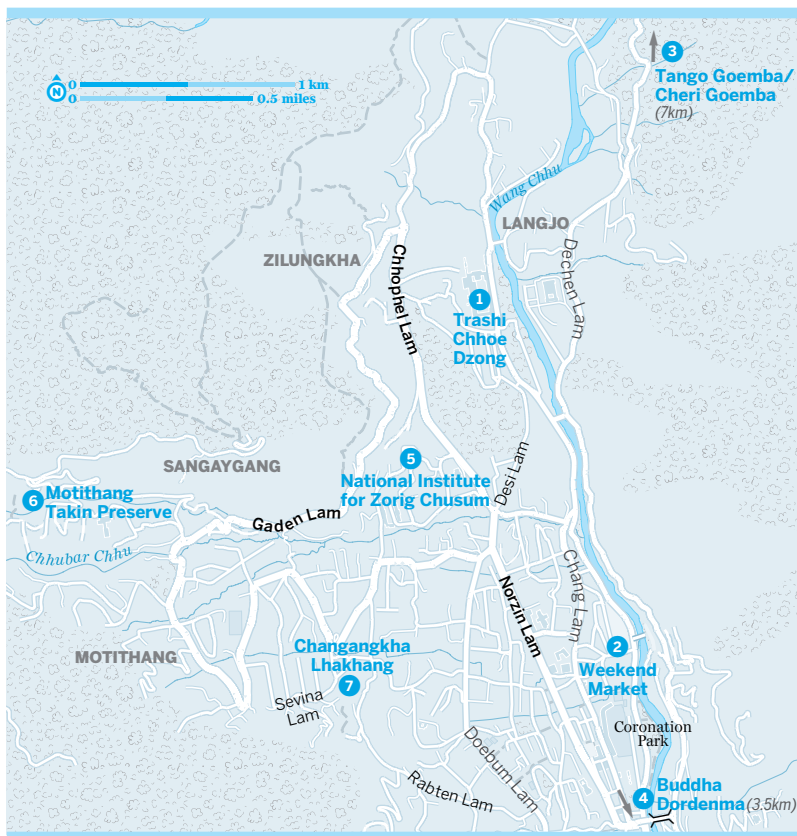
★ **Trashi Chhoe Dzong**

BUDDHIST, DZONG

(Map p50; ☉ 5-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun, to 5pm in winter) This splendid dzong, north of the city on the west bank of the Wang Chhu, seems to fit seamlessly into the valley, lending the city both regal splendour and monastic weight. The dzong was the site of the lavish formal coronation of the fifth

king in 2008 and hosts the city's biggest annual bash, the colourful tsechu festivities.

The building you see is actually not the original Thimphu dzong. In 1216 Lama Gyalwa Lhanangpa built Dho-Ngen Dzong (Blue Stone Dzong) on the hill above Thimphu where Dechen Phodrang now stands. A few years later Lama Phajo Drukgom Shigpo, who brought the Drukpa Kagyu lineage



Thimphu Highlights

1 Roam the peaceful courtyards of the grand and serene **Trashi Chhoe Dzong** (p49)

2 Plunge into the pungent, bustling **Weekend Market** (p52) for incense and artefacts

3 Hike through whispering pines and rhododendrons to

the serene solitude of **Tango Goemba** (p70) or **Cheri Goemba** (p70)

4 Look up in awe at the mighty **Buddha Dordenma** (p57) that gazes over the city

5 Marvel at the skill and artistry of Bhutanese arts and crafts at the **National**

Institute for Zorig Chusum (p52)

6 Inspect and photograph the seriously odd-looking takins at **Motithang Takin Preserve** (p57)

7 Join the pilgrims at colourful **Changangkha Lhakhang** (p57), Thimphu's liveliest temple