

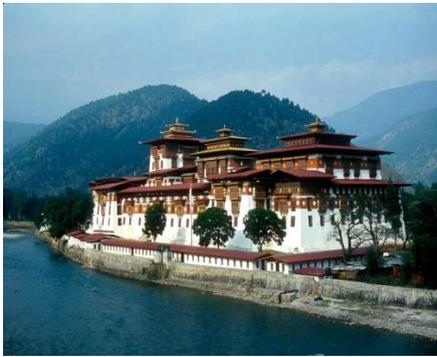
PUNAKHA

Punakha Dzongkhag has been inextricably linked with momentous occasions in Bhutanese history. It served as the capital of the country from 1637 to 1907 and the first national assembly was hosted here in 1953. It is the second oldest and second largest dzong in Bhutan and one of the most majestic structures in the country.

On October 13, 2011, the wedding of the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, and his fiancé, Jetsun Pema, was held at the Punakha Dzong.

Punakha valley has a pleasant climate with warm winters and hot summers. It is located at an average elevation of 1200 meters above sea level. Owing to the favorable climatic conditions, rice grows very well in this region and is the main cash crop cultivated here. Two major rivers in Bhutan the Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu converge in this valley. Punakha Dzong is built at the confluence of these two rivers and is an especially beautiful sight on sunny days with sunlight reflecting off the water onto its white-washed walls.

In addition to its structural beauty, Punakha Dzong is notable for containing the preserved remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the unifier of Bhutan as well as a sacred relic known as the Ranjung Karsapani. This relic is a self-created image of Avalokiteswara that miraculously emerged from the vertebrae of Tsangpa Gyarey the founder of the Drukpa School when he was cremated.



Place to Visit in Punakha

i. **Koenchhogsum Lhangkhang:** The structure is built on the site where it is believed to have a large lake underneath, where Terton Pema Lingpa discovered several treasures. The Lhangkhang houses one of the largest ancient bells, probably the largest in the whole world, whose ring is said to be heard as far as Lhasa in Tibet in the ancient days. The bell however remains out of use due to the crack which it has suffered when the Tibetan troops tried to steal it in the 17th century. The small statues of the three Buddha (past, present and future) which are said to have flown from Khini monastery in Kurtoe can also be seen in the temple.

ii. **Chimi Lhakhang:** also known as Chime Lhakhang or Monastery or temple, is a Buddhist monastery in Punakha District. Located near Lobesa, it stands on a round hillock and was built in 1499 by the 14th Drukpa hierarch, Ngawang Chogyel after the site was blessed by the "Divine Madman" the maverick saint Drukpa Kunley (1455–1529) who built a chorten on the site.

iii.Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten : A beautiful hike takes one to the regal Khamsum Yuelley Namgel Chorten, which was built to remove negative forces and promote peace, stability and harmony in the changing world. The Chorten dominates the upper Punakha Valley with commanding views across the Mo Chhu and up towards the mountainous peaks of Gasa and beyond.

iv.Talo : The village of Talo (alt. 2,800m) which is scattered along the hill slopes, known for its cleanliness and hygiene among Punakha villages. Talo Sangnacholing is built on a plateau and has majestic view of surrounding villages. The beautiful farm houses of the village have its own flower gardens and on the hill slope corns and sweet peas are grown in abundance. The women of Talo are particular known for their beauty.

v.Nalanda Buddhist College : Locals call this place 'Dalayna' while the monks refer it as 'Nalanda Buddhist College'. Drive here in the afternoon and enjoy your evening tea supplemented by the ravishing view in front, along with interaction with local monks.

From	To	Distance	Driving Time
Paro	Thimphu	65kms	1hr
Paro	Haa	65kms	1.5-2hrs
Thimphu	Haa	115kms	3-4hrs
Thimphu	Punakha	77kms	3hrs
Thimphu	Wangdue Phodrang	70kms	3hrs
Trongsa	Bumthang	68kms	2hrs
Bumthang	Mongar	198kms	7-8hrs
Mongar	Trashigang	91kms	3-4hrs
Trashigang	Trashiyangtse	55kms	2hrs
