

Thimphu



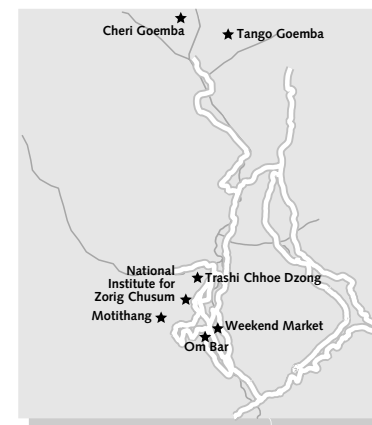
You approach Thimphu along a winding, single-lane access road, little wider than the trucks that suddenly emerge around each curve. Each blind bend promises a glimpse of your destination; however, for most of the journey all that is revealed is another curve followed by another. The steep hillsides are dotted with houses, some abandoned, their massive earthen walls slowly crumbling, and the occasional white-washed temple. Suddenly the road drops to a modern expressway on the valley floor, whisking you through paddy fields to the capital of one of the world's most intriguing countries.

Established as the capital in 1961, Thimphu has a youthful exuberance that constantly challenges the country's conservatism and proud tradition. The ever-present juxtaposition of old and new is just one of its appealing qualities. Crimson-robed monks, Indian labourers, *gho*- and *kira*-clad professionals and camera-wielding tourists all ply the pot-holed pavements, skirt packs of sleeping dogs, and spin the prayer wheels of Clocktower Square, and nobody, it seems, is in a hurry. Thimphu is the world's only capital without traffic lights. A set was installed, but the residents complained that it was impersonal, and so gesticulating, white-gloved police continue to direct the ever-increasing traffic. As well as being a classic Bhutanese anachronism, it may well be the city's most photographed spectacle.

Thimphu offers the best opportunity to do your own thing. It's relaxed, friendly and pretty informal, and is most rewarding if you can be the same.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Savour the serenity of the powerful yet peaceful architecture of **Trashie Chhoe Dzong** (p101)
- Immerse yourself in the pungent, colourful, bustling **weekend market** (p103) – a gastronomic wonderland and gaudy artefact bazaar
- Stretch your legs and climb through whispering pines to the peaceful solitude of either **Tango Goemba** or **Cheri Goemba** (p115)
- Bend your elbow at one of Thimphu's friendly bars, such as **Om Bar** (p112), and meet the locals over *momos* and beer
- Marvel at the skill and artistry of Bhutanese youth at the **National Institute for Zorig Chusum** (p104)
- Spot an incongruous takin at the **Motithang Takin Preserve** (p106)



■ ELEVATION: 2320M

■ POPULATION: 98,676

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 02

ORIENTATION

The road from the south (and Paro) is met by the new expressway 11km from the Thimphu. As it races along the valley floor it passes below Simtokha Dzong, before entering Thimphu CBD, marked by an elaborately decorated petrol station. The city sprawls north and west in the lightly wooded valley of the Wang Chhu.

The road leading north from the petrol station is Norzin Lam, Thimphu's main drag, which takes you through the town centre past several major hotels and the pretty Clocktower Sq, the city's heart. Not far north of the square is the famous traffic circle with the arm-waving police. From the traffic circle, Norzin Lam continues uphill past the cinema, the Bank of Bhutan and the government handicraft emporium. At the northern end of Norzin Lam, Desi Lam leads to the National Library, Folk Heritage Museum, the golf course and Trashi Chhoe Dzong. A turn to the west back at the traffic circle puts you on Chorten Lam, which intersects with Doendrup Lam near the Swiss Bakery, before heading south towards the Memorial Chorten. The road leading east from the traffic circle, Wogzin Lam, takes you either to Clocktower Sq or you can continue east on Gatoen Lam past Benez Restaurant to Chang Lam, a north-south thoroughfare that runs beside and above the Changlimithang archery ground and sports stadium.

Doebum Lam makes a loop from the Memorial Chorten above and to the west of the CBD to the northern end of Norzin Lam, passing the Drichu Drakey Bakery and the sports complex on the way. Numerous smaller streets weave their way uphill to government offices and the posh suburb of Motithang west of the centre.

The east and west banks of the Wang Chhu are connected by Lungten Zampa, the bridge at the south end of town. Chhogyel Lam runs north beneath the bridge, past the archery ground, sports stadium, Zangto Pelri Lhakang and the weekend market. On the eastern bank, Dechen Lam leads to several hotels and eventually to the monasteries at the head of the valley. For information on getting around the city, see p114.

Maps

City maps (Nu 100) are available in bookshops and handicraft shops. The Department of

Survey & Land Records publishes the *Thimphu City Map*, which shows all the ministries, other government offices and religious buildings. The similar, glossy *Thimphu/Paro City Map* has an inset showing many of the hotels and shops, plus a small map of Paro on the reverse side.

Although usually well signposted, very few locals, including taxi drivers, actually know and use street names; landmarks and building names will serve you better when asking for or giving directions. To add to the confusion, several of the street names on signposts differ from those on city maps. For more on maps, see p249.

You can download maps of hiking trails around Thimphu from www.bhutan-trails.org/index.html. For more information on these trails see p117).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Thimphu's bookshops carry Bhutanese and Indian newspapers, periodicals and a selection of books on Bhutan, Tibet and Buddhism. Prices are quite reasonable, especially for Indian editions, which are cheaper than overseas editions.

Book World (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323386; bookworld@druknet.bt; Clocktower Sq) At the southwestern end of the square next to Jimmy Bros Stationery, this tiny shop has a good selection of coffee-table books and posters as well as internet access.

DSB Books (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323123; dsb@druknet.bt; Chang Lam) Probably Thimphu's best selection of coffee-table and other books on Buddhism, Bhutan and the region. Particularly good for Bhutanese and Indian newspapers. On the ground floor of Jojo's Shopping Complex; enter from the lane behind Chang Lam.

Megah Books (Map pp102-3; ☎ 321063; Wogzin Lam) Has a smaller selection that includes some dusty, hard-to-find-elsewhere books on Bhutan.

Pekhang Bookshop (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323094; Norzin Lam) Somewhat hidden in the same building as the Luger Cinema; carries lots of stationery supplies.

Emergency

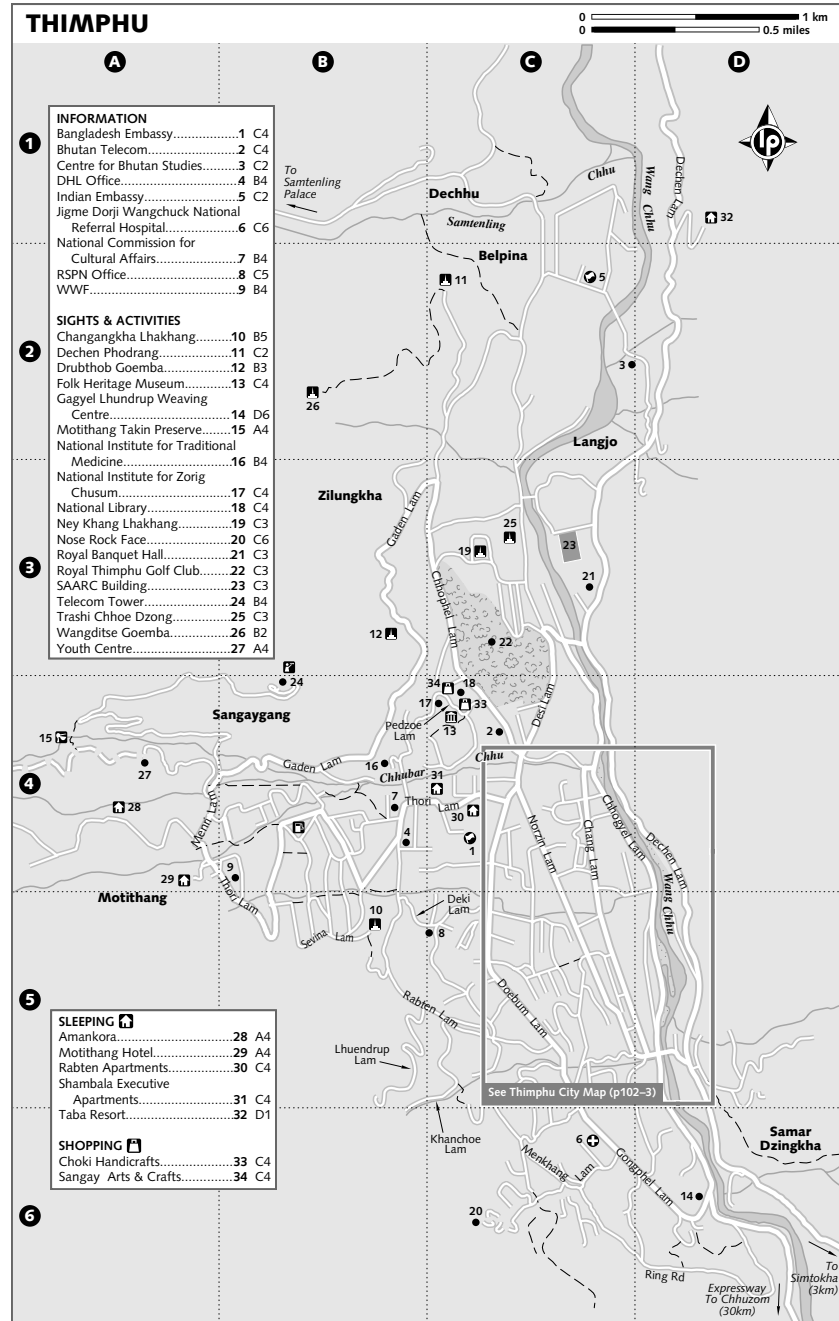
Ambulance (☎ 112)

Fire (☎ 110)

Police (☎ 113)

Internet Access

There are a dozen or so internet cafés spread around town, all charging Nu 50 to 70 per hour. Several hotels have rudimentary



THIMPHU IN...

Most of the major attractions will already be included in your itinerary. Here are a few suggestions if your itinerary includes some free time in Thimphu.

24 hours

After your hotel breakfast head down to the **weekend market** (p103) and soak up the sights, sounds and smells of the produce stalls before crossing the atmospheric cantilever bridge, Kuendeyling Baazam, to the trinkets, artefacts and clothing stalls on the east bank of the Wang Chhu. If the market isn't on, check out the **Chamlingthang Archery Ground** (p105) for activity or drop into the **National Textile Museum** (p105), **Painting School** (p104) or **VAST** (p105) to watch artisans at work or find that unique souvenir. Wander back to your hotel for lunch or visit a local *momo* (steamed or fried dumpling) restaurant on Norzim Lam, the famed **Swiss Bakery** (p112), or the trendy **Art Cafe** (p112) for coffee and cake. Round off the afternoon by checking out the numerous **shopping centres** (p113) for handicrafts, books, trekking equipment or Bhutan's extravagant postage stamps. As beer o'clock approaches head towards one of Thimphu's friendly bars, such as **Benez** (p112) or the **Zone** (p112). After-dinner entertainment can be found in one of the many discos or a late-night haunt such as the **Om Bar** (p112).

business centres with internet access, charging considerably more.

Atsara Business Centre (Map pp102-3; City Centre Complex, Wogzin Lam; ☎ 9am-10pm)

Book World (Map pp102-3; Clocktower Sq; ☎ 9am-6pm) Comfy and fast, but only two terminals.

Cyber Café (Map pp102-3; Chorten Lam; ☎ 9am-8pm) Upstairs, next to Plums Café.

Norling Cyberworld (Map pp102-3; Norling Centre, Norzin Lam; ☎ 9am-10pm)

Laundry

Most hotels offer laundry services, but none has in-house dry-cleaning facilities. Dry-cleaning takes two days at **Kelly Dry Cleaners** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 326434; Centre Mall, Norzin Lam), next to the Luger Cinema. The larger hotels have clothes dryers and provide same-day service. During wet weather smaller hotels may return your laundry damp, or even the following day. If you are on a tight schedule, ask about the drying facilities before you hand in your laundry.

Libraries

Jigme Dorje Wangchuck Public Library (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322814; Norzin Lam; ☎ 12.30-5.30pm Mon-Friday, 9am-1pm Sat) This small library has a dog-eared collection of paperback novels as well as a few reference books.

National Library (Map p99; ☎ 322885; Pedzoe Lam; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) A better resource for books about Bhutan. Though the selection of books in English is small, this is also a worthwhile cultural sight. See p104 for more details.

Medical Services

Pharmacies can supply medications, including over-the-counter antibiotics, for travel-related conditions:

City Pharmacy (Map pp102-3; ☎ 321382; City Centre Complex, Wogzin Lam) A well-stocked pharmacy, upstairs in the back of the complex.

India Bhutan Friendship Hospital (Map p99; ☎ 322485; Chorten Lam)

Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322496, 322497; Gongphel Lam) The best hospital in Bhutan.

Norling Medical (Map pp102-3; Norling Centre, Norzin Lam) Opposite the Hotel Tandin.

Money

Most hotels can change money at government rates, although they usually have a limited supply of cash. A few places advertise that they accept Amex and Visa cards but, apart from in the handicraft shops, card transactions are a rare event (see p250 for more information). If you're planning to use a credit card to pay a bill in a hotel, settle the bill between 9am and 5pm, while the authorisation office is open.

Bank of Bhutan (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322266; Norzin Lam; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) The main branch; it tends to be busy.

Bank of Bhutan (Map pp102-3; Wogzin Lam; ☎ noon-2pm Mon, to 4pm Wed-Sat) Smaller city branch only two blocks away from main branch.

Bhutan National Bank (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322767; Chang Lam; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) In the same building as the main post office. Money-changing is straightforward at this branch.

Post

Many hotels and shops sell stamps. Be assured that it is safe to simply drop cards and letters into post boxes here.

Post office (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322381; Chang Lam; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) This main office is a well-organised facility with a postcard and philatelic shop.

Telephone

Dotted throughout the city there are public call offices (PCOs) that have direct international dialling. You can also make cheaper internet calls at most internet cafés (see p98). For details on making calls see p254.

Tourist Information

You will find most of your information needs are met by your Bhutanese tour company and guide. There is no visitor information centre in Thimphu, however, English-language newspapers, handicraft shops and your hotel staff are all useful sources for up-to-date, what's-on information.

In the event of a problem with your Bhutanese tour company, the **Department of Tourism** (DOT; Map pp102-3; ☎ 323251; fax 323695; www.tourism.gov.bt; Doebum Lam) can provide advice and assistance.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There's almost nothing in Thimphu to cause concern. Extraordinary numbers of stray dogs roam at will and bark across town at each other all night, but earplugs solve that problem quite easily. Beware of steep/missing/broken steps and open drains on the pavements. Be careful crossing roads and don't trust cars to stop when you are on a pedestrian crosswalk.

SIGHTS

Thimphu's attractions are clustered to the north of the city (where you will find the dzong (fort-monastery), library, painting school and folk museum), in the hilly suburb of Motithang overlooking the town, and of course in the city's central district.

Trash Chhoe Dzong

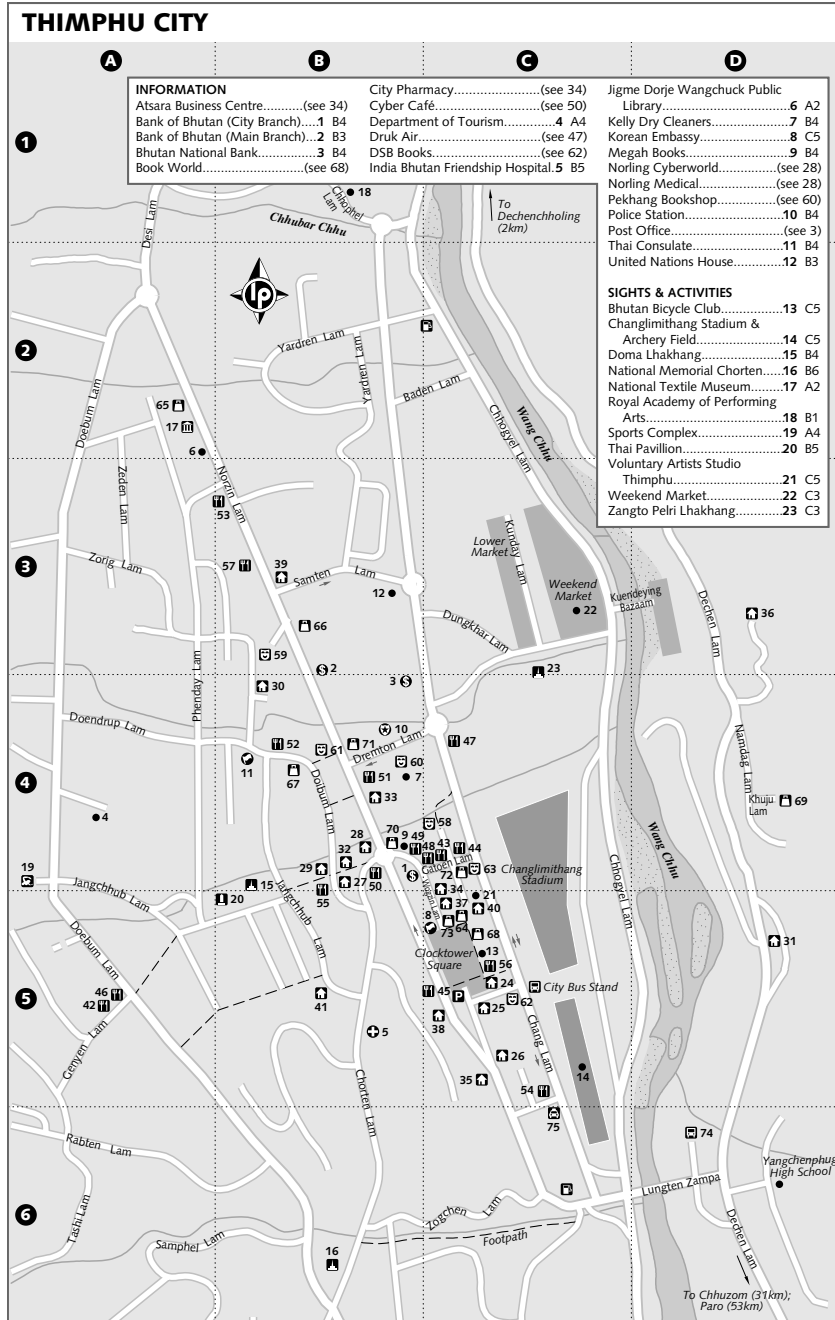
This large dzong, north of the city on the west bank of the Wang Chhu, manages not to impose on the valley or the city as a dominant, impenetrable fortress; rather, its splendid proportions and modest setting bestow a subtle, monastic magnificence. The whitewashed

outer structure is two storeys high with three-storey towers at the four corners projecting out over the walls and capped by red-and-gold, triple-tiered roofs. The outer walls are built of trimmed, neatly fitted granite blocks, unlike other dzongs, which were made of roughly dressed stones. Similarly, the *dochey* (courtyard) is paved with rectangular stone slabs. The dzong housed the original National Assembly and now houses the secretariat, the throne room and offices of the king and the ministries of home affairs and finance.

Trash Chhoe has two main entrances on its eastern side. One leads to the administrative section towards the south, and another, towards the north, leads to the monastic quarter, the summer residence of the *dratshang* (central monk body), and where the dances of the annual tsechu festival (see p60 and p107) are performed. The dzong's Sangay Tsokhorsum Thondrol (the immense *thangka* – painted or embroidered religious picture – that is unfurled at the climax of the tsechu) depicts the Buddha Sakyamuni and his two disciples.

Entering the dzong you are greeted by lively sculptures of the Guardians of the Four Directions (see p80), the wrathful gatekeepers Chana Dorje and Hayagriva, and the popular 'Divine Madman', Drukpa Kunley (see p136). Look for the mural of the Four Friends (see p57), depicting a much-loved Bhutanese fable. Upon entering the courtyard you are taken by the splendid proportions of the architecture and the vast courtyard; the enclosed silence only broken by the flight of pigeons, the shuffle of feet and the whirr of prayer wheels. A large *utse* (central tower) separates the northern monastic courtyard, which surrounds the highly decorated Lhakhang Sarpa (New Temple), from the southern courtyard. The northern monastic assembly hall houses a large statue of Sakyamuni, the Historical Buddha (see p75), and meticulous murals illustrate the life of Buddha and portray mystical mandalas.

This is 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 to Bhutan, took over the dzong. In 1641 the Zhabdrung acquired the dzong from the descendants of Lama Phajo and renamed it Trash Chhoe Dzong (Fortress of



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the Glorious Religion). He arranged to house both monks and civil officials in the dzong, but it was soon found to be too small. The Zhabdrung then built another dzong, known as the lower dzong, for the civil officials and used the original building for the monks. The 13th Druk Desi, Chhogyel Sherab Wangchuck (1744–63), later enlarged Trashi Chhoe Dzong so that it could again accommodate both civil officials and monks.

The original dzong was destroyed by fire in 1771 and was abandoned in favour of the lower dzong, which was expanded. That dzong itself suffered a fire in 1866 and twice since then. The five-storey *utse* was damaged in the 1897 earthquake and rebuilt in 1902.

When he moved the capital to Thimphu in 1962, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck began a five-year project to completely renovate and enlarge the dzong. The royal architect performed the repairs without touching the *utse*, Lhakhang Sarpa or any other of its chapels at the centre. Other than these structures, the entire dzong was rebuilt in traditional fashion, without nails or written plans.

Below the dzong is an excellent example of a traditional cantilever bridge. To the south of the dzong is a set of low (and unattractive) administration buildings (for which there are demolition plans). West of the dzong is the small tower of Ney Khang Lhakhang, which houses a statue of Sakyamuni flanked by the protective deity Gyenyen Jagpa Melen and Dorje Daktsen, the female guardian deity of Phajoding.

Weekend Market

The weekend market is crammed into a set of stalls on both banks of the Wang Chhu, just north of Changlimithang Stadium. Vendors from throughout the region arrive on Thursday and Friday and remain until Sunday night. It's an interesting place to visit, where village people jostle with well-heeled Thimphu residents for the best and cheapest vegetables and foodstuffs.

Depending on the season, you may find potatoes, garlic, numerous varieties of chillies, red and white rice, cauliflowers, cabbages, lettuces, eggplants, asparagus, peas, several kinds of mushrooms and the young, curly fern fronds known as *nakey*. Fruits come from local orchards and from southern regions. You will find oranges, apples, bananas, mangoes, apricots, peaches and plums. If you wander off into one corner of the market,

you'll find an odoriferous collection of dried fish, freshly slaughtered beef and pork, and balls of *datse* (homemade soft cheese). During the winter you can even pick up a leg of yak (with the hoof still attached).

Across the newly constructed cantilever footbridge, Kuendeyling Bazaam, to the west bank is a collection of stalls housing clothing, fabric and handicrafts. Here you will find locally produced goods (as well as plenty of stuff from Nepal), including prayer wheels, cymbals, horns, cloth, baskets and remarkable hats from various minority groups. Bargaining is very much in order and you may find your guide or a local can advise you on the quality of your intended purchase.

National Institute for Zorig Chusum

The **National Institute for Zorig Chusum** (Map p99; ☎ 322302; izc@druknet.bt; Pedzoe Lam; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is commonly known as 'the painting school'. It operates under the auspices of the National Technical Training Institute and offers four- to six-year courses that provide instruction in many of Bhutan's traditional arts to students from throughout the country whose aptitude is more artistic than academic. The students follow a comprehensive course that starts with drawing and progresses through painting, woodcarving, embroidery and statue-making.

Most tour operators include a visit to the school in their sightseeing program. Though large groups of visitors disrupt the classes, you will be astounded at the skill and discipline of the young students. The images of the Buddhist deities on p75 were painted by senior students of the school.

Don't be surprised if you are accosted by one or two entrepreneurial types selling their wares. If you want to peruse a wider selection of the students' art, see Shopping (p113).

National Memorial Chorten

This large Tibetan-style **chorten** (Map p99; Chorten Lam) was built in 1974 to honour the memory of the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. The whitewashed chorten is decorated with richly carved annexes facing the cardinal directions, and features elaborate mandalas, statues and a shrine dedicated to the popular third king. There are numerous religious paintings and complex tantric statues housed inside reflecting both peaceful and wrathful aspects of Buddhist deities.

The memorial chorten, with its sun-catching golden finial, is one of the most visible religious structures in Thimphu, and for many people it is the focus of their daily worship. Throughout the day people circumbulate the chorten, whirl the large red prayer wheels and pray at a small shrine inside the gate. The early morning is particularly tranquil as elderly people shuffle in, and spruced-up kids on their way to school whiz in and out to pay homage.

Folk Heritage Museum

A restored three-storey, rammed-earth and timber building houses the **Folk Heritage Museum** (Phelchey Toenkhyim; Map p99; ☎ 327133; Pedzoe Lam; SAARC national/adult Nu 25/150; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat). The house replicates a traditional farmhouse and is furnished as it would have been about a century ago. A guided tour of this almost-living museum is included in the admission and provides a glimpse into traditional Bhutanese life. The house design and many of the implements are also reminders of how many rural Bhutanese still live today. Bring a torch (flashlight) as some of the rooms are quite dimly lit.

National Library

West of the golf course is the **National Library** (Map p99; ☎ 322885; Pedzoe Lam; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri). It was established in 1967 to preserve many ancient Dzongkha and Tibetan texts, and is a lavishly decorated and vibrant example of Bhutanese architecture.

Pride of place on the ground floor is a copy of the largest published book in the world. Entitled *Bhutan*, this mega tome would crush any coffee table and defy any bookshelf. Its illustrated pages are turned one page per month. Details on the book and how to buy a copy can be found at www.friendlyplanet.org. Also on the ground floor are the English-language books. There are a few travel books about India and Tibet, and many about Buddhism and Himalayan history, but it's an eclectic collection where you might find anything. There is a collection of bound volumes of *Kuensel* and another collection of the many reports produced by agencies that have undertaken development or research projects. There is also a small collection of books about Bhutan on a shelf behind the checkout desk.

Traditional books and historic manuscripts are kept on the top floor – it's worth the climb. Many of these books are Tibetan-style, printed or written on long strips of handmade paper

stacked between pieces of wood and wrapped in silken cloth. There are displays of several significant documents which are well labelled in English. In another section is an old printing press and wooden blocks used for printing books and prayer flags.

Sometimes you will see people circumambulating the National Library building and chanting mantras. This is because the building houses many holy books. An altar on the ground floor, with statues of Bhutan's most important historic figures, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, Pema Lingpa and Guru Rinpoche, also contributes to the building's sacred importance. Other displays include a model of Punakha Dzong and an exhibit of Chorten architecture. The library has a branch at Kuenga Rabten palace south of Trongsa in central Bhutan.

SAARC Building

The large traditional Bhutanese-style building across the river from Trashi Chhoe Dzong was built in the early 1990s to provide a venue for a meeting of the heads of state and government from the South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). That meeting was never held in Bhutan but plans are in the pipeline now that Bhutan boasts several hotels that meet the five-star needs of the SAARC officials. The impressive structure now houses the planning and foreign ministries, and the National Assembly was relocated to this building in 1993. Long 'corridors of power' lead to the elaborately decorated National Assembly (held twice a year), while nearby is the Royal Banquet Hall.

National Institute of Traditional Medicine

Established in 1978, one of the more interesting facilities in Thimphu is the **National Institute of Traditional Medicine** (Map p99; ☎ 324647; www.health.gov.bt/indigenous/index.htm; Serzhong Lam; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat). The EU provides funding for this project, which prepares and dispenses traditional herbal and other medicines. There is an impressive laboratory and production facility that manufactures quality products, the components of which may include plants, minerals, animal parts, precious metals and gems. All kinds of pills, tablets, ointments and medicinal teas from here are distributed to regional health-care units around the country.

There is a day-care facility and clinic where doctors diagnose patients and prescribe appropriate medicines or treatments. Tour operators can arrange visits to the institute. There is a small museum and gift shop where you can purchase *tsheringma*, a safflower-based herbal tea.

The institute also researches the use of medicinal herbs and plants and has a trial plot on the premises. It has field units that collect medicinal plants from far away places such as Lingzhi in western Bhutan, where a number of significant medicinal species grow in abundance.

National Textile Museum

Thimphu's **National Textile Museum** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 321516; Norzin Lam; SAARC national/adult Nu 25/150; ☎ 9am-4pm) is worth a visit to get to know the living national art of weaving. Exhibitions introduce the major weaving techniques, styles of local dress and textiles made by women and men. There is usually a small group of weavers working their looms inside the shop, which features work from the renowned weaving centres in Lhuentse Dzongkhag, the ancestral home of the royal family in northeastern Bhutan. Each item is labelled with the name of the weaver, at prices ranging from Nu 1500 to 25,000.

Changlimithang Stadium & Archery Ground

The national stadium occupies the site of the 1885 battle that helped establish the political supremacy of Ugyen Wangchuck, Bhutan's first king. It is now the site of the national archery ground, a large football stadium and parade ground, basketball, tennis and squash courts, as well as the headquarters of the Bhutan Olympic committee. It's always worth checking to see what event is taking place when you are in town.

Voluntary Artists Studio Thimphu

The impressive **Voluntary Artists Studio Thimphu** (VAST; Map pp102-3; ☎ 325664; www.vast-bhutan.org; Chang Lam) is hidden away on the top floor of a not-so-impressive building on Chang Lam. After negotiating several flights of betel-stained stairs you emerge at the study, which can be incredibly busy with after-school and weekend classes in drawing and painting for young artists. The goal of the studio (which accepts donations) is to use Bhutanese artistic values to create both traditional and contemporary works and to

provide vocational training. There's a small library and coffee shop where budding artists are encouraged to congregate. Art by the students and instructors is sold in the exhibition spaces in the studio and in the Art Shop Gallery (see p113) in Clocktower Sq.

Motithang Takin Preserve

A short distance up the road to the telecom tower is a trail leading to a large fenced area that was originally established as a mini-zoo. The king decided that such a facility was not in keeping with Bhutan's environmental and religious convictions, and it was disbanded some time ago. The animals were released into the wild but the takins, Bhutan's national animal, were so tame that they wandered around the streets of Thimphu looking for food, and the only solution was to put them back into captivity. It's worthwhile taking the time to see these oddball mammals. The best time to see them is early morning when they gather near the fence to feed. It's a five-minute walk from the road to a viewing area where you can take advantage of a few holes in the fence to take photographs. For more about this curious creature see p87.

Telecom Tower

There's a wonderful view of Thimphu valley from the hillside below the telecommunications tower (2685m), high above the town at the end of a road that branches off from the approach to the youth centre. The complex also houses the broadcasting studios of Bhutan TV and is festooned with prayer flags. Don't photograph the telecommunications installation, but the valley is worth a few snaps particularly in the afternoon. The area is known as Sangaygang and the access road attracts fitness fanatics after work and becomes a lovers' lane after dark.

Royal Academy of Performing Arts

The home of the Royal Dance Troupe is the **Royal Academy of Performing Arts** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322569; Chhophel Lam; 🕒 8.45am-4.30pm Mon-Fri). It provides formal training for masked dancers and also works to preserve Bhutan's folk-dancing heritage. Unless there's a practice session on, there's little to see here. The professional dancers from this school perform several of the dances at the Thimphu tsechu. With advance notice they will provide a one-hour performance for visitors.

Changangkha Lhakhang

This is an old fortresslike **temple** and monastic school perched on a ridge above Thimphu, southeast of Motithang. It was established in the 12th century on a site chosen by Lama Phajo Drukgom Shigpo, who came from Ralung in Tibet. The central statue is Chenresig in an 11-headed, thousand-armed manifestation. There are enormous prayer wheels to spin and even the prayer books in the temple are larger in size than usual Tibetan texts. Don't leave without taking in the excellent view from the courtyard.

Drubthob Goemba

After you drive down the road from the telecom tower, you will find yourself on Gaden Lam, the road that runs high above the golf course. There are some great views of the town, and of Trashi Chhoe Dzong, and above you can see Drubthob Goemba, which now houses the Zilukha nunnery.

Dechen Phodrang

At the end of Gaden Lam is Dechen Phodrang, the site of Thimphu's original Trashi Chhoe Dzong (see p101 for a brief history). Since 1971 it has housed the state monastic school, and a long procession of monks often travels between here and the dzong. A team of 15 teachers provides an eight-year course to more than 450 students. On any regular day the grounds hum with assorted recitations emanating from the windows. The 12th-century paintings in the goemba's Guru Lhakhang have been restored and the upper floor features a large figure of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal as well as the *goenkhang* (chapel devoted to protective and terrifying deities). The central figure in the downstairs chapel is the Buddha Sakyamuni.

Zangto Pelri Lhakhang

This private chapel, built in the 1990s by Dashi Aku Tongmi, a musician who composed Bhutan's national anthem, is south of the weekend market. It's beside the older Yigja Dungkhar Lhakhang and is a replica of Guru Rinpoche's celestial abode. It is Bhutan's tallest lhakhang and houses many large statues, including a 4m-high image of Guru Rinpoche.

ACTIVITIES

You will probably be too busy sightseeing, trekking or shopping to swim, cycle or go rock

climbing, but these activities are available if you want them.

There are two tennis courts, squash courts and a basketball court at the north end of the Changlimithang Stadium.

Golf

The **Royal Thimphu Golf Club** (Map p99; ☎ 325429; www.golfbhutan.com; Chhophel Lam; green fees & club hire per day US\$50) has a nine-hole course beautifully situated above Trashi Chhoe Dzong. Indian Brigadier General TV Jaganathan, posted in Bhutan between 1968 and 1973, got permission from King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck to construct a few holes. The king later granted permission to expand the course to nine holes, recognising that it would provide an attractive green area adjacent to Trashi Chhoe Dzong. The course was formally inaugurated in 1971 as the Royal Thimphu Golf Club.

Caddies are available for Nu 200 to 300, but since they are mostly schoolboys, they are usually not on site until late afternoon. You can buy lost balls from kids for Nu 20 to 50. You don't need to make an appointment to play, but weekends are busy and you may have to wait to tee off.

Cycling

The **Bhutan Bicycle Club** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 321905; www.bhutanmtb.com; Clocktower Sq) organises rides and has bikes for hire (US\$30 per day, including helmet). A helmet is required within Thimphu city limits and, of course, is highly recommended elsewhere. The club can arrange to have you and the bike transported to the start of several rides (see p244 for more information).

Rock Climbing

Bhutan's only rock-climbing club, **Vertical Bhutan** (☎ 322966; verticalbhutan@hotmail.com), gathers most weekends to climb on The Nose, a rock face high above the southwest part of Thimphu. There are several prepared routes with names such as 'Wedding Present' and 'Reach and Preach'. Contact the club via email or call the club secretary, Dilu Giri, for the climbing schedule.

Swimming

You can swim in the pool at Thimphu's **Sports Complex** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322064; Doebum Lam; Nu 50; 🕒 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun Feb-Nov). There is also a basketball court and gym.

WALKING TOUR

A young city, Thimphu is not crowded with historical sights but its size makes it ideal for a wander, turning into lanes and following your nose. It's impossible to get lost; if you get confused just head downhill towards the river and you will soon come across something you recognise. See the map on p108.

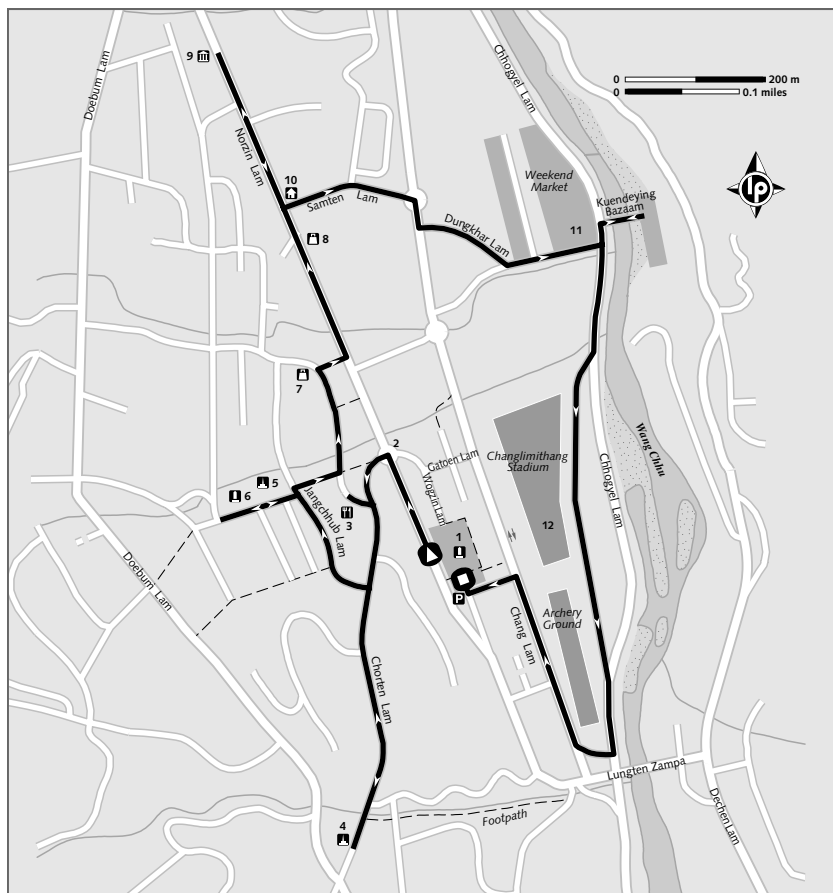
For a slightly strenuous excursion, start at **Clocktower Square (1)**, head up the stairs to Norzin Lam and turn north to reach the **traffic circle (2)** with the arm-snapping police. Walk uphill along Chorten Lam past the **Art Café (3)**; p112) – why not drop in for excellent coffee and cake – to observe the circumambulations of the **National Memorial Chorten (4)**; p104). Backtrack along Chorten Lam and turn left at Jangchub Lam, which takes you north to the rather neglected **Doma Lhakhang (5)** and **Thai Pavillion (6)**. Head down a footpath (northeast) to Doendrup Lam, and turn left towards bustling **Hong Kong Market (7)** and, after perusing the shops, take the narrow alley lined with vegetable sellers to Norzin Lam. From here it's an easy stroll downhill back to Clocktower Sq or turn left and continue up Norzin Lam past the **Handicrafts Emporium (8)**; p113) to the **National Textile Museum (9)**; p105), both worthwhile detours. Head back south down Norzin Lam and drop into the opulent **Taj Tashi Hotel (10)**; p110) to check out the ambience, restaurants and bars. Continue east along Samtem Lam to Chang Lam and then further east down Dungkhar Lam to the market area, which has permanent shops but really comes to life during the **Weekend Market (11)**; p103). Head along Chhogyel Lam while keeping an eye out at **Changlimithang Stadium (12)**; p105) for any sport activity before heading back along Chang Lam to Clocktower Sq.

COURSES

Some Bhutanese tour companies offer specific tours to cater for special-interest groups, such as bird-watchers, and it is by no means impossible to organise instructive courses in cooking, religion, meditation etc, which can be worked into your itinerary. Of course you will need to organise this with the tour company well in advance.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Thimphu really comes alive during the annual tsechu, held consecutively over eight to ten days in September/October, corresponding to the eighth lunar month in the Bhutanese



calendar. For dates and more information see p247. Another colourful and entertaining event that is uniquely Bhutanese is a good archery competition; see p113 for details.

SLEEPING

If you are on a normal tourist visa, you will probably be booked into one of the comfortable midrange hotels unless you have paid a premium for a top-end hotel. Also, if you have scheduled your trip during the Thimphu tsechu, you may find yourself 'bumped' into budget digs, a smaller guesthouse or even a private home. If you end up as a house guest, you will get the chance to make new friends and will have found the perfect recipient for the bottle of duty-free liquor you bought en route.

If you are an Indian national or are working in Bhutan on a project, you have the option to choose a more moderately priced hotel. The budget hotels listed here are not as comfortable as the tourist hotels, but they're all quite adequate. For those paying their own way, hotels will charge 10% sales tax and 10% service on the rates shown. Many of the smaller hotels make no distinction between double or single occupancy and simply charge by the room.

Budget

All the hotels listed below have hot water and heating, but you may have to turn on your hot water service yourself (and don't forget the tap as well) and request a portable room heater.

Hotel Zey Zang (Map pp102-3; ☎ 334707; Norzin Lam; s/d Nu 600/800) The recently established Zey Zang is a comfortable and secure hotel at the top of the budget range. The rooms are rather characterless (save for the bright curtains), airy, carpeted, spotless and equipped with cable TV and heater. The small bathrooms have a shower but no tub. There's a large restaurant and very attentive staff.

Centre Lodge (Map pp102-3; ☎ 334331; fax 324709; Centre Mall, Norzin Lam; d Nu 800-1200) Most of this hotel's rooms are bright and sunny, heated, have a TV and are very well kept. The name is apt for this central location. The down side is the seemingly endless staircase to access the rooms.

Hotel Tandin (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322380; Norzin Lam; s/d/ste Nu 350/450/650) The Tandin is in the centre of the city, near the cinema, and boasts a bar, restaurant and a nifty little philatelic shop. The rooms are plain and not immune to noise, but have the all-important heater plus the less necessary TV.

Hotel Voedzer (Map pp102-3; ☎ 324007; fax 325927; City Centre Complex, Wogzin Lam; s/d from Nu 400/500) This friendly hotel is conveniently located near Clocktower Sq. The rooms are a little tired but clean enough and there are larger suites available. The restaurant does great Indian food and the chef's shepherd's pie has attracted a small appreciation society.

Hotel Norling (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322997; fax 324447; Norling Centre, Norzin Lam; s/d Nu 350/550) The Norling is central, cheap and noisy and the basic rooms are clean and the staff friendly.

Midrange

All hotels in this range have TV (cable or satellite), heating, phones and private bathrooms with 24-hour hot water. Prices given are usually for standard rooms; a smaller number of deluxe rooms and suites are also usually available for a higher tariff, and some hotels have apartments for long-term rental.

Druk Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322966; fax 322677; druk hotel@druknet.bt; Wogzin Lam; s/d/ste Nu 2700/3000/6000; ☑) This hotel has long been considered the best in Thimphu. With the arrival of the big boys in the form of Taj and Aman, the friendly Druk will settle for a lower profile – which will suit many of its fans. It is in the centre of town, overlooking Clocktower Sq and boasts a bar, a multicuisine restaurant noted for its Indian food, a business centre with wireless internet, a hair salon and a health club with a gym, sauna and steam bath.

Jumolhari Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322747; fax 324412; www.hoteljumolhari.com; Wogzin Lam; s/d Nu 2500/2900; ☑) This centrally located hotel bills itself as a boutique hotel and boasts a classy ambience and stylish décor. The rooms are tasteful, carpeted and comfortable; there is a health club with spa, and an excellent restaurant serving Indian, Continental, Chinese and Bhutanese dishes.

Hotel Druk Sherig (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322598; fax 322714; Wogzin Lam; s/d/ste Nu 950/1200/1500) The rooms in this former guesthouse are brightly decorated in Bhutanese décor and feature lots of polished wood. A vivid *ghori* hangs over each entrance to the spacious rooms, and the multicuisine restaurant specialises in local dishes.

Hotel Riverview (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323497; fax 323496; Dechen Lam; s/d Nu 1500/1800; ☑) On the east bank of the Wang Chhu is this hefty, pseudo-Bhutanese-style hotel. All of the spacious, carpeted, well-appointed rooms have a balcony with a river and town view. It's a little inconvenient if you want to stroll around town but there's a restaurant, business centre, conference room and handicraft shop on the premises.

Jambayang Resort (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322349; fax 323669; jambayang@druknet.bt; Dechen Lam; s/d Nu 1200/1800; ☑) High above the Wang Chhu on the east bank is the charming Jambayang Resort. This sprawling old-fashioned guesthouse has 16 individual rooms, some with balcony and views, and four private apartments with kitchens. Many Bhutanese recommend the restaurant here with its great view.

Hotel Phuentsholing Pelri (Map pp102-3; ☎ 334970; fax 323392; phuentshopelri@druknet.bt; Phenday Lam; s/d Nu 1625/2000; ☑) This new hotel was still receiving its finishing touches when we visited. The huge doubles had polished floorboards, thicker-than-usual mattresses, and tea and coffee facilities. The elevator, business centre and top-floor apartments were still works in progress, whereas the swish restaurant and bar were up and running.

Hotel Dragon Roots (Map pp102-3; ☎ 332820; fax 332823; droots@druknet.bt; Wogzin Lam; s/d Nu 1800/2200; ☑) The oddly named Dragon Roots boasts an elevator which, although small, should make this hotel relatively wheelchair friendly. The well-equipped rooms are cosy with wooden floors and carved furniture, and there is a large restaurant serving Bhutanese, Indian, Chinese and Continental dishes, with plenty of vegetarian options.

Wangchuk Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323532; htlwchuk@druknet.bt; Chang Lam; s/d Nu 1530/1950) This hotel

overlooks the stadium and is a favourite of many expatriates. The wood-panelled, carpeted rooms are spacious, light and comfortable so don't be put off by the gloomy lobby. The nightly rates include breakfast and the restaurant has a good reputation.

Hotel Pedling (Map pp102-3; ☎ 325714; fax 323592; pedling@druknet.bt; Doendrup Lam; s/d Nu 1450/1800; 📍) The double rooms are comfy and well appointed with computer plug-in points, but show their age and are overdue for sprucing up. There is a good restaurant with the usual multicuisine menu and a business centre.

Yeedzin Guest House (Map pp102-3; ☎ 325702; fax 324995; yeedzin@druknet.bt; Jangchhub Lam; s/d/ste Nu 700/1000/1200) This delightful guesthouse overlooks central Thimphu and oozes old-world charm. For long-staying guests there are five suites, each with a kitchen. The appealing restaurant is warmed by an open fire and dishes up continental, Chinese and Bhutanese fare at tables or on local-style benches.

Motithang Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322435; Thori Lam; s/d Nu 1020/1290) Looking older than its 1990s heritage, the rustic, wood-panelled Motithang is quite a distance above the business district, in a peaceful rural setting. The appealing rooms are lined in warm wood and there's a multicuisine restaurant.

Hotel Galingkha (Map pp102-3; ☎ 328126; fax 322677; Doebum Lam; s/d Nu 1000/1500) Opposite the Swiss Bakery, the rooms of the Galingkha are spacious with basic facilities and furnishings. The fascinating aspect over the southern traffic circle is a bonus for the view but also a curse when the canine opera commences at night. The Thai restaurant downstairs (see opposite) is good for a change of cuisine.

Hotel Taktsang (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322102; fax 323284; Doibum Lam; s/d Nu 1100/1300; 📍) Tucked in behind the Galingkha, the rooms at the Taktsang are spacious and carpeted and share the dogs after dark. There is a multicuisine restaurant and a salon.

APARTMENTS

A couple of the hotels above have apartments for long-term guests. Alternatively there are specialist providers of self-contained accommodation.

Shambala Executive Apartments (Map p99; ☎ 323363; fax 323600; Thori Lam; apt per month Nu 32,500) These spacious two-bedroom, two-bathroom, fully furnished, fully serviced apartments boast polished floorboards, wood panelling

and other nice touches. Nightly rates for short-term guests are available on request.

Rabten Apartments (Map p99; ☎ 323587; rabten@druknet.bt; Thori Lam; apt per month Nu 18,000) Long-term guests can stay in these fully furnished (including TV) apartments and the rent includes cleaning and laundry. The restaurant specialises in Bhutanese banquets, where you must call ahead for a reservation.

Top End

Taj Tashi Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322966; fax 322677; Norzim Lam; holidays@tajhotels.com; s/d/ste US\$300/300/500; 📍) At the time of research, the finishing touches were being applied to this centrally located, 66-room hotel that towers over Thimphu but cleverly incorporates traditional architecture. There are several categories of luxury accommodation, with all rooms beautifully appointed with traditional art and contemporary comfort. Guests can choose to dine in three restaurants, take tea in the tea lounge or sample the bar. One's ingestion sins can be expunged in the gym, spa or heated indoor pool.

Amankora (Map p99; ☎ 8272333; www.amankoraresorts.com; Thori Lam; s/d US\$925/1000; 📍) On the 'less is more' theme comes this five-star resort on the outskirts of town, far from the dogs and traffic of Norzin Lam. The only sounds to penetrate the vertical breaches in the stone walls are the whispers of the surrounding pine grove. Amankora looks like a mini dzong, its stone-paved passageways inspiring hushed tones in the reverential guests. Inside the open-plan rooms, plenty of wood and tan-coloured textiles mellow the monastery asceticism. The traditional *bukhari* wood heater is a nice touch; so is the altar-like bath tub. If you can leave the bath, you can spa yourself silly, have a massage or take in one of the cultural programs. Airport transfers, meals in the immaculate restaurant (Bhutanese and Continental menu), and beverages are included in the tariff.

EATING

Thimphu's dining scene is dominated by the hotel restaurants, but there's a handful of cosy cafés and restaurant-bars that hint of epicurean evolution in progress.

Hotel restaurants tend to be a predictable multicuisine compilation of Indian, Bhutanese, Chinese and Continental. Not surprisingly one kitchen rarely excels in all cuisines and we have used locals', expats' and our own gluttonous adventures to source what's good and

where. Bhutanese cuisine is widely available, but beware the hot chillies that are an essential, omnipresent ingredient. Other ingredients are seasonal, including meat, so don't be surprised to find some menu items unavailable.

Restaurants

When four groups are in residence most hotels have a buffet at Nu 300 to 500, but it's usually possible to order from the à la carte menu too.

Seasons Restaurant (Map pp102-3; ☎ 327413; Doendrup Lam; mains Nu 150-200; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This deservedly popular restaurant specialises in pizzas – excellent veg and non-veg varieties – and pasta. There's also a balcony overlooking the bustling Hong Kong Market where you can enjoy a Red Panda wheat beer. And from December to March ask about the yummy yak roast.

Benez Restaurant (Map pp102-3; ☎ 325180; Gatoen Lam; mains Nu 40-120; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Tue) Benez is a lively and inviting restaurant in the centre of town, with a cosy bar in the back that is popular with locals and expats, especially on Fridays. In addition to the multicuisine mains there are excellent bar snacks of *momos*, *samosas*, fried cheese balls, etc.

Druk Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322966; Wogzin Lam; mains Nu 75-150; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This spacious restaurant caters to tour groups as well as Thimphu's business and who's-who crowd (at least until the Taj Tashi gets going). The Indian menu is excellent and the multicuisine business lunch is top value at Nu 90.

Jumolhari Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322747; www.hoteljumolhari.com; Wogzin Lam; mains Nu 50-150; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This delightful restaurant in one of Thimphu's most appealing hotels is notable for its delicious tandoori and curries, delicate naans, cold beer and relaxed atmosphere.

Bhutan Kitchen (Map pp102-3; ☎ 331919; Gatoen Lam; mains Nu 100-300; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This elegant restaurant showcases Bhutanese cuisine (in addition to a multicuisine menu) in a spacious but warm setting that features traditional seating, a traditional kitchen and store room. It was designed with tour groups in mind, so you can dive into *ema datse* (chillies and cheese) and other local dishes without calling for the fire brigade. Finish off with a warm *arra* – the local firewater.

Plums Café (Map pp102-3; ☎ 324307; Chorten Lam; mains Nu 60-120; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A small sign above a door points patrons upstairs to this popular restaurant which offers conti-

mental food as well as an extensive range of Chinese and Bhutanese. It's another ideal place to try *ema datse* or a dish of local mushrooms or *nakey*.

Rice Bowl (Map pp102-3; ☎ 333844; Centre Mall, Norzin Lam; mains Nu 70-150; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Excellent chilli pork, Sechuan chicken or the recommended crispy sesame chicken, are just some of the numerous spicy offerings best enjoyed by sharing.

Thai Cuisine (Galingkha Hotel; Map pp102-3; ☎ 328126; Chorten Lam; mains Nu 60-80; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Local, fresh ingredients are given the Thai touch and presented with flair in this spacious restaurant overlooking the southern traffic circle. Peruse the menu by all means but it's better to ask the chef what she recommends on the night.

Mid Point Restaurant (Map pp102-3; ☎ 321269; Wogzin Lam; mains Nu 30-60; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This is a favourite restaurant of many Bhutanese for its generous local, Chinese and Indian dishes, particularly *dosas* and other south Indian cuisine, at very reasonable prices.

S.N.S. Restaurant (Map pp102-3; ☎ 326177; Chang Lam; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Conveniently located next to All Stars Disco, S.N.S. is a busy place on disco nights and is the only restaurant in town where you might get a late-night snack. It has the only Japanese food around.

NT Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323458; Norzin Lam; mains Nu 30-70; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Don't bother checking out the rooms, but the restaurant is a recommended, basic, inexpensive, hot curry and cold beer haunt. Don't inspect under the tables but do enjoy the Tuesday special.

Most hotel restaurants can put on decent meals, and a few have other charms: **Jambayang Resort** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322349; Dechen Lam; mains Nu 70-180; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) is noted for its olde worlde charm and superb view over town; on the other hand, the **Amankora** (Map p99; ☎ 8272333; set menu US\$50) boasts international fare and five-star service. Not surprisingly the hotels that primarily cater to Indian guests serve up good-value curries. Try the **Hotel Yoedzer** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 324007; Wogzin Lam; mains Nu 40-90; 🍴 lunch & dinner), which also does a mean shepherd's pie; the **Terdzor Hotel** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 334453; Norzin Lam; mains Nu 30-50, buffet per person Nu 130; 🍴 lunch & dinner), which has outstanding Nepali (Friday) and Punjabi (Saturday) buffets; or the **Hotel New Grand** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 324290; Norzin Lam; mains Nu 30-50; 🍴 lunch & dinner), an unsophisticated vegetarian restaurant with south Indian delicacies.

Cafés

Art Café (Map pp102-3; ☎ 327933; Doebum Lam; cakes & soups Nu 50-150; ☎ 7.30am-7pm, closed Mon) Smart, bright and cosy best describe this Thimphu trendsetter. Great coffee and wicked cakes (such as the addictive chocolate tart) will have you returning again and again, and the small mains selection – hearty soups, pasta, noodles – make for an ideal lunch.

Swiss Bakery (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322259; Chorten Lam; ☎ 8am-7pm Wed-Mon) On a hill above the southern traffic circle, this was Bhutan's first attempt at a fast-food joint. It was opened in 1970 by one of Bhutan's first expatriates and despite its well-worn appearance it's a much-loved institution with expats and locals. It serves great cheese omelettes, plastic-wrapped sandwiches and hamburgers, and a small selection of 'homemade' cakes.

Chasa Café (Map pp102-3; Clocktower Sq; ☎ 8am-7pm) Tiny Chasa has minuscule tables and cheap Bhutanese dishes (all under Nu 70), such as eye-watering *ema datse* and soothing fried rice.

Khamsa Coffee House (Map pp102-3; ☎ 333652; Changlam Plaza, Chang Lam; snacks Nu 25-65; ☎ 10am-8pm) Upstairs (lots of stairs) is this modern coffee shop where you can get espresso, milkshakes, pancakes and other snacks, as well as a view.

Quick Eats

Jichu Drakey Bakery (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322980; Doebum Lam; from Nu 15; ☎ 7am-noon & 1.30-7.30pm) Stroll up the hill for first-rate takeaway (there are no tables) cakes and pastries. Small items include pear cakes, cream rolls and tarts, and you can also order apple pie, strudel and larger cakes.

Mendayla Sweets (Map pp102-3; Chang Lam; ☎ 8am-8pm) For Indian sweets, ice cream, yogurt, chocolate, even samosas and pizza, head to this bright sweets shop.

Self-Catering

For fresh produce, remember the busy weekend market, which kicks off on Thursday, and the semi-concealed stalls in Hong Kong market.

Tashi Supermarket (Map pp102-3; Clocktower Sq; ☎ 8am-7.30pm) Huge supermarket with vast range imported and local groceries, ice creams and refrigerated chocolates.

Sharchhogpa Grocery (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323280; Norzin Lam; ☎ 7am-9pm) Friendly grocery shop with cereals, bread and plenty of packaged foodstuffs.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Thimphu has numerous bars, but only a handful could be recommended for outsiders looking for more than a game of snooker and a swig of whisky. Entertainment can also be a bit of a challenge – unless it's *tschu* time. Occasional concerts and video shows at the sports complex will be well advertised by posters and in the newspapers.

Bars

As well as the hotel bars, there are numerous small bars throughout the town. Alcohol won't be served until after 1pm and most bars are closed on Tuesday, the national dry day. Bars close at 11pm weekdays and midnight on Friday and Saturday.

Om Bar (Map pp102-3; ☎ 326344; www.changkhang.com; Jojo's Shopping Complex, Chang Lam; ☎ from 5pm, closed Tue & Sun) Thimphu's 'in' bar and a quiet gathering spot early in the evening that becomes busy with a diverse collection of locals and expats after 10pm. It's on the 2nd floor of the shopping complex.

Favourite after-work bars (which double as restaurants) include cosy **Benez Restaurant** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 325180; Gatoen Lam; ☎ 11am-11pm), with its talking points such as coasters and cash from around the globe and designer rums, and the **Zone** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 331441; Chang Lam; ☎ noon-midnight), with its modern décor and great chips, burgers and pizzas for late-night munchies.

Nightclubs & Live Music

For a small town there's a fair bit of competition in this scene with live music replacing disco and vice versa and places running hot and cold. Ask around for the latest vibe. Don't expect the discos to kick off much before midnight. Depending on the entertainment and the time you rock up, a cover charge may be applicable. Nightclubs and discos close at midnight weekdays and at 2am Friday and Saturday.

Here are a few on offer:

All Stars Disco (Map pp102-3; Chang Lam; ☎ 10pm-2am Wed, Fri & Sat)

Boomerang (Map pp102-3; Yarkay Central, Norzin Lam; ☎ 9pm-2am Wed, Fri & Sat) A bright venue with big-screen TV, try-out bands and a young crowd.

Buzz Club (Map pp102-3; Chang Lam; ☎ 11pm-2am Wed, Fri & Sat) Big, bold and popular.

Gravity (Map pp102-3; Zangto Pelri Shopping Complex, Norzin Lam; ☎ 10pm-2am Wed, Fri & Sat) Hidden, but follow the signs.

Space 34 (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323497; Jojo's Shopping Complex, Chang Lam; ☎ 10pm-2am Wed, Fri & Sat) Cosy and thumping and right next to the Om Bar.

Cultural Programmes

If you are in a group of more than four, your tour operator can arrange a dance performance at the Royal Academy of Performing Arts (see p106). A more relaxed atmosphere prevails at **Tashi Nenchu Music Studio** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322804) near the Zangto Pelri Lhakhang. The studio can provide a Bhutanese meal and an evening of classical and folk music around a bonfire.

Mila Restaurant (Map pp102-3; ☎ 325519; Dragon Shopping Complex, Norzin Lam) features singers and a Dzongkha comedian most nights. There is a largely local audience and the performers, both amateur and professional, sing traditional Bhutanese songs. When there are professional acts expect a Nu 50 cover charge. After 8pm members of the audience can request songs at Nu 100 each.

Cinemas

The usually crowded and always uncomfortable **Luger Cinema** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322317; Norzin Lam) screens Hindi and Bhutanese movies as well as the occasional ancient English/foreign-language movie.

Sport

ARCHERY

Tournaments (see p62) are scheduled on many weekends at the Changlimithang Archery Ground. Whether it's the traditional bamboo or the high-tech carbon-fibre bows, the skill, antics and camaraderie are always entertaining. For dates of events check the papers. Archers practise at the target field at the south end of Changlimithang Stadium on most mornings.

FOOTBALL

The national football tournament takes place in August at Changlimithang Stadium, with teams from schools throughout the country competing. At major matches the Royal Bhutan Army band provides the half-time entertainment.

SHOPPING

Thimphu has a plethora of general shops containing a hodgepodge selection such as light bulbs, stationery, farm implements, shampoo, computer disks and canned fish. To provide even more variety, shops may sell drinks by

the glass and their sign may read 'shop cum bar' or the all-encompassing 'general cum bar shop'.

Many items on sale are made in India, but there are lots of interesting Bhutanese products, especially textiles, baskets, jewellery, incense, books and religious items.

At the **Duty Free Shop** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322167; Norzin Lam) you can buy imported liquor, wine, biscuits and other 'luxury' items, but you have to pay the full price, including duty, unless you're a diplomat or a senior government official.

Archery

Catering to the large community of Bhutanese archers, **Bhutan Archery Shop** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 332100; Norling Centre, Norzin Lam) specialises in American-made Hoyt brand bows that range in price from US\$600 to US\$1100. Arrows are the steel-tipped Easton brand, which sell for Nu 280 to 500. It's a relatively expensive sport. The traditional bamboo bows are usually homemade and the bamboo arrows can be picked up at the weekend market.

Contemporary Paintings & Handmade Paper

Jungshi Handmade Paper Factory (Map pp102-3; ☎ 323431; Khuju Lam; ☎ 8.30am-5pm, Mon-Sat) This small factory produces watermark paper as well as cards, lampshades, envelopes, calendars and other items made from traditional Bhutanese paper.

Located near the Clocktower, **Art Shop Gallery** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 325664; Wogzin Lam) has art supplies, traditional paper and handicrafts, and contemporary paintings from the **Voluntary Artists Studio Thimphu** (VAST; Map pp102-3; ☎ 325664; www.vast-bhutan.org; Chang Lam), which also sells art during regular exhibitions.

Gho & Kira

If you want to wear Bhutanese dress, there are many shops in Thimphu's shopping complexes that have ready-made *gho* and *kira* in a variety of sizes, patterns and quality. **Kelzang Handicrafts** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 321353; Yarkay Central, Norzin Lam) and the **Handicrafts Emporium** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322810; Norzin Lam) are two to try.

A handmade cotton *kira* costs around Nu 4000 while a silk *kira* sells for Nu 50,000 to 80,000. A *gho* costs about Nu 2000 if it's made from machine-woven cloth and Nu 4000 to 6000 for hand-woven cotton cloth. A silk *gho* can cost from Nu 12,000.

In the industrial estate at the south end of Thimphu, the **Gagyel Lhundrup Weaving Centre** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 327534; Changzamtok; ☎ 9am-5pm) produces hand-woven textiles on site and has a selection of cloth and ready-made garments for sale. This is one of the few places where you can watch weavers at work.

Handicrafts, Traditional Arts & Jewellery

Don't neglect the handicraft section at the weekend market, where you can put your bargaining prowess to the test. To purchase the excellent works by students of the National Institute for Zorig Chusum visit **Sangay Arts & Crafts** (Map p99; ☎ 327419; Pedzoe Lam), in a building on the road below the school. Behind the school, a narrow lane leads through a garden to a small house where a traditional craftsman makes and sells drums and Tibetan violins.

There are numerous handicraft shops selling *thangkas*, masks, brassware and jewellery, including the following.

Handicrafts Emporium (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322810; Norzin Lam; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sun) This is a large government-run emporium with fixed prices.

Druktrin Rural Handicrafts (Map pp102-3; ☎ 324500; Clocktower Sq) At the rear of the Wangchuk Hotel (enter from Clocktower Sq), this shop offers a great variety and has a small museum with antique jewellery and textiles.

Druk Handicraft (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322258; Yarkay Complex, Norzin Lam) Good range of 'antiques', handicrafts and earrings.

Choki Handicrafts (Map p99; ☎ 324728; fax 323731; Pedzoe Lam) Near the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, this establishment manufactures and sells masks, *thangkas*, paintings and painted lama tables called *choektse*.

Zangmo Handicrafts (Map pp102-3; Wogzin Lam) Sells work from the National Institute for Zorig Chusum and sometimes has students practising there.

Music

CDs and tapes of Bhutanese and Hindi songs are available for Nu 200 to 400 in numerous shops, including **Norling Audio** (Map pp102-3; Norling Centre, Norzin Lam).

Postage Stamps

Bhutan Post occupies the northern half of a large building on Dremton Lam, a back road north of the cinema. The **Philatelic Bureau** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 322296; Dremton Lam) here has a counter that sells stamps and souvenir sheets of Bhutanese stamps. There is also a tiny shop

on the ground floor of Hotel Tandin (p109), which has a small selection of postcards and unusual stamps.

Trekking Equipment

If you are missing a piece of gear for your trek, try **Sachak Enterprise** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 333880; Centre Mall, Norzin Lam) for good Nepalese copies of brand-name gear. **Namgyel Tyres** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 325311; Gatoen Lam) stocks hiking boots and is your best bet for larger sizes. There are also a few shops around town that sell Bangladeshi-made fleece jackets, hats and pants at bargain prices – look for the shops full of cardboard boxes stacked with clothes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The journey to/from Phuentsholing took up to 10 days before the road was completed in 1962. It now takes six hours. See p155 for details of the drive.

Bus

The long-distance bus station is below the east end of the bridge (*zampa*) at the southern end of town. Here you can find numerous crowded buses (*vomit comets*) to Paro (Nu 35), Phuentsholing (Nu 110; Coaster Nu 170) and other destinations throughout the country (see p265 for more details).

GETTING AROUND

If you are on a normal tourist visa, you will have a car/minibus, driver and guide available throughout your stay in Bhutan, and you'll have little trouble getting around. Most shops and points of interest are within easy walking distance of Thimphu's major hotels; it's easy to pop out for a drink or a round of shopping on foot.

To/From the Airport

You can book a taxi at the tea stall outside Paro airport at a fixed rate of Nu 800 to Thimphu. It is 53km from the airport to Thimphu; the journey takes less than two hours.

If your tour operator has not arranged transport for your departing flight, the most reliable way is to have your hotel arrange a vehicle. Arrange your transport well in advance. If you have an early-morning flight from Paro (and most are), you're recommended to spend the night in Paro. Druk Air closes the counter an hour before flight time and won't reopen it if you're late.

Bus

A public bus service operates throughout Thimphu between 7.30am and 7.30pm from a starting point at the parking area on Chang Lam. Fares are Nu 1 to 9 depending on the distance travelled. In addition to several city routes, the buses also operate to Dechenchoeling in the north and Simtokha and Babesa to the south. Routes, fares and timetables are available at www.bhutanpost.com.bt.

Taxi

Most of the taxis are tiny Maruti minivans with meters that the drivers rarely use. The taxi stand is on Chang Lam, although you can flag down an empty taxi in the street. Taxi drivers have a habit of charging foreigners, including Indians, as much as they can – one of Bhutan's few flagrant rip-offs. You should be able to hire a taxi for the whole day for about Nu 500, and local trips should cost between Nu 40 and 60 in a shared taxi.

AROUND THIMPHU

NORTH OF THIMPHU

As you travel up the east side of the Wang Chhu, north of Lungten Zampa and past the Riverview Hotel, you'll eventually pass the SAARC building (National Assembly), which overlooks the dzong. On the opposite side of the river you may catch a glimpse of Samtenling Palace, the cottage that is the king's residence. A short distance north is the suburb of Taba where the Forestry Institute has its offices and you can stay at the atmospheric **Taba Resort** (Map p99; ☎ 323532; htlwchuk@druknet.bt; off Dechen Lam; s/d from Nu 1530/1950). The resort is associated with the Wangchuk Hotel in town and boasts a restful, pine-forest location, mineral spring, hot-stone baths and a private goemba built on the ruins of a former palace. There are great valley views from the balconied rooms.

The large **Dechenchoeling Palace** is some distance north of the dzong. It was built in 1952 and is the official residence of the queen mother. North of the palace is the Royal Body Guard (RBG) facility.

Pangri Zampa

North of Dechenchoeling and east of Dechenphu Lhakhang is **Pangri Zampa**, two imposing white buildings in a grove of giant cypress trees. Founded in the early 16th century,

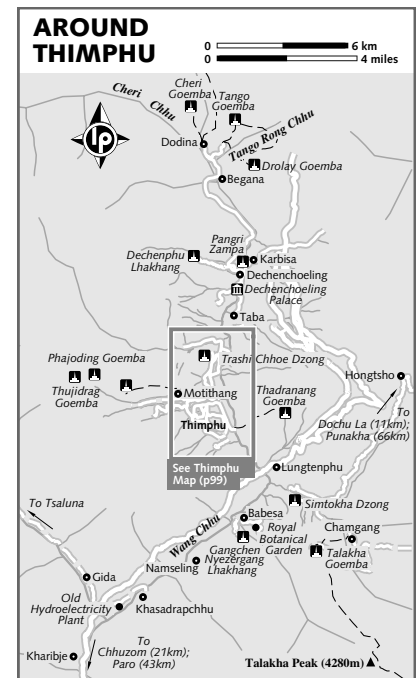
Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal lived here after he arrived in 1616 because this temple appeared in the vision that directed him from Tibet to Bhutan. A well-respected astrologer is in residence and frescoes here are said to have been painted by the Zhabdrung.

Dechenphu Lhakhang

Dechenphu Lhakhang is a 2km drive on a rocky road up a side valley from a turn-off near Dechenchoeling, then a short climb up a stone staircase to an elevation of about 2660m. The imposing, tall red *goenkhang* is dedicated to the powerful deity Gyenyen and is said to be able to supply armour and weapons for an endless number of soldiers. Unesco financed a project to restore many of the paintings in the adjoining goemba.

Tango Goemba & Cheri Goemba

Continuing up the valley the road crosses to the east side of the Wang Chhu at Begana, near a training facility operated by the electricity department and a large gold-painted petroglyph of Chenrisig on a rock beside the road. There are no restaurants or shops



nearby. If you plan a full-day excursion to either Tango Goemba or Cheri Goemba, bring a water bottle and a packed lunch.

A few kilometres beyond Begana, 12km from Thimphu, a road leads east and climbs a short distance to a parking lot. The trail to **Tango Goemba** is a climb of 280m and takes about half an hour if you follow the steeper shortcut, or about an hour if you take the longer, more gradual trail. Lama Gyalwa Lhanampa founded the goemba in the 12th century. The present building was built in the 15th century by the 'divine madman', Lama Drukpa Kunley (see p136). In 1616 Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal visited Tango Goemba and meditated in a cave nearby. The head lama, a descendent of Lama Drukpa Kunley, presented the goemba to the Zhabdrung, who carved a sandalwood statue of Chenresig, which he installed in the monastery.

The picturesque three-storey tower and several surrounding buildings were built in the 18th century by the eighth *desi* (secular ruler), Druk Rabgye. The Zhabdrung Jigme Chhogyel added the golden roof in the 19th century. Tango is the residence of an important young *trulku* (reincarnate lama) who is recognised as the seventh reincarnation of the highly respected fourth *desi*, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye, whose previous incarnation passed away in 1830.

A short distance beyond the turn-off to Tango Goemba the road ends at Dodina (elevation 2600m). A walk of about one hour leads to **Cheri Goemba** (Cheri Dorji Dhen). The trail starts by crossing a lovely covered bridge that spans the Wang Chhu, and then climbs steeply to the monastery where there are tame deer and soaring birds. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal built this goemba in 1620 and established the first monk body here. A silver chorten inside the goemba holds the ashes of the Zhabdrung's father.

SOUTH OF THIMPHU

A road leads uphill from Babesa to the Royal Botanical Garden at Serbithang, which was inaugurated in 1999 and has a collection of 500 species of plants. It's a favourite picnic spot of Thimphu residents and has an information centre that sells seedlings and medicines from the medicinal-plants project.

South of Babesa a steep gravel road leads 1.3km uphill to the Gangchen Nyezergang Lhakhang, an ancient lhakhang that was re-

built and reconsecrated in 2001 under the sponsorship of Lyonpo Jigme Thinley.

Simtokha

Simtokha is about 5km south of Thimphu on the old road to Paro and Phuentsholing. The junction with the road to eastern Bhutan is just before Simtokha.

In the valley below the road are the EU-funded plant-and-soil-protection project and the large, red-roofed Royal Institute of Management.

SIMTOKHA DZONG

Officially known as Sangak Zabdhon Phodrang (Palace of the Profound Meaning of Secret Mantras), Simtokha Dzong was built in 1629 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. It is often said to be the first dzong built in Bhutan. In fact, there were dzongs in Bhutan as early as 1153, but this is the first dzong built by the Zhabdrung, is the oldest dzong that has survived as a complete structure, and is the first structure to incorporate both monastic and administrative facilities. It is the home of the Institute for Language and Culture Studies; the students are both monks and lay people.

The site is said to have been chosen to guard over a demon that had vanished into the rock nearby, hence the name Simtokha, from *simmo* (demoness) and *do* (stone). Conveniently, the site is also an excellent location from which to protect the Thimphu valley and the valley leading to the Dochu La and eastern Bhutan. The dzong is about 60m square and the only gate is on the south side. (Though the original gate was on the west side.)

The *utse* is three storeys high and behind the usual prayer wheels around the outside there is a line of more than 300 fine slate carvings with painted faces depicting saints and philosophers. The large central figure in the central lhakhang is of Sakyamuni; he is flanked by images of eight Bodhisattvas: Jampelyang, Chana Dorje, Chenresig, Jampa, and the less-familiar Sai Hingpo (Shritigarva), Dupa Nampasel, Namkhe Hingpo (Akash Garva) and Kuentu Zangpo. The paintings inside this lhakhang are said to be some of the oldest and most beautiful in Bhutan. One of the lhakhangs, Gen Khang, may be visited only by the lamas. In the west lhakhang chapel are paintings of Chenresig, green and white Taras, and an early painting of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, which was restored and cleaned in 1995. Large

DAY WALKS AROUND THIMPHU

In addition to the walks to Tango Goemba (p115) and Cheri Goemba (p115), there are good day walks to monasteries and lookout points near Thimphu. You cannot go into the monasteries, but most are architecturally interesting and command good views of the valley. The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) has published *Mild and Mad Day Hikes Around Thimphu* by Piet van der Poel & Rogier Gruys, with details of 27 hikes as well as numerous alternatives and side trips. You can also download it from www.bhutan-trails.org/index.html. As the title suggests, the hikes range from easy walks to the 25km Thimphu to Paro 'Punishment Trail'. It is important to remember that many of these hikes pass meditation cells near monasteries. Don't shout, disturb them or knock on the door to ask for directions.

Drolay Goemba

It's a two- to three-hour round trip from the parking lot below Tango Goemba to Drolay Goemba at 3400m. The walk offers amazing views of the Thimphu valley and you can combine it with a walk to Tango Goemba.

Lungchuzekha Goemba

The best easy walk in the area is a three- to four-hour round trip from Dochu La to Lungchuzekha Goemba. It affords excellent views of the Bhutan Himalaya and you can return via the same route or descend to Trashigang Goemba and Hongtsho. From the 108 chortens the trail gradually climbs into red, white and pink rhododendron forest for 1½ hours with some steep sections, before branching left to Longchuzekha Goemba and right to Trashigang. Combine with dawn views from Dochu La for a great half-day excursion or do it after a morning visit to Punakha.

Phajoding Goemba

It is a 5km walk uphill from the youth centre in Motithang to Phajoding Goemba (3640m), a large monastic complex with 10 lhakhangs and 15 monastic residences, many of them used for extended meditation retreats. It was founded in the 13th century by Togden Pajo, a yogi from Tibet, who was searching for a place of meditation. Most of the buildings were constructed in 1748 through the efforts of Shakya Rinchen, the ninth Je Khenpo, whose image is the central figure in the main Khangzang Lhakhang here. The monastic school is housed in the Jampa Lhakhang and offers a more secluded environment than the Dechen Phodrang School in Thimphu.

From Phajoding you can ascend another 300m to Thujidrag Goemba. This is the last day of the Druk Path Trek in reverse. See p212 for details.

Talakha Goemba

The 15th-century Talakha Goemba (3080m) offers spectacular views of the Bhutan Himalaya and Thimphu valley. You can drive part way and then set out on foot. From the small goemba you can make a strenuous six- to nine-hour hike up to the 4280m Talakha peak.

Thadrang Goemba

Another strenuous two-hour uphill hike leads to Thadrang Goemba (3270m). Start at the Yangchenphug High School and climb steeply up the ridge through a blue-pine forest.

Trashigang Goemba

It's two hours from the hillside below Hongtsho to Trashigang Goemba (3200m). This goemba was built in 1786 by the 12th Je Khenpo. It is an important meditation centre and there are numerous small houses for pilgrims near the goemba. In addition to about 16 monks, there are a few *anims* (Buddhist nuns). Inside the lhakhang there are statues of several Je Khenpos who meditated here.

Wangditse Goemba

An easy one-hour walk with great views of Thimphu that takes you from the telecom tower to Wangditse Goemba, which was founded in 1750 by the attendants of Bhutan's eighth *desi*, Druk Rabgye, and renovated in 2001. The lhakhang houses the statues of the guardian deities Yeshey Goenpo (Mahakala), Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) and Tsheringma (the goddess of longevity).

paintings of mandalas and the guardians of the four directions adorn the *gorikha* (porch).

During its construction Simtokha Dzong was attacked by a coalition of Tibetans and five Bhutanese lamas who were opposed to the Zhabdrung's rule. The attack was repelled and the leader of the coalition, Palden Lama, was killed. In 1630 the Tibetans again attacked and took control of the dzong. The Zhabdrung regained control when the main building caught fire and the roof collapsed,

killing the invaders. Descriptions of the original Simtokha Dzong were provided by the two Portuguese Jesuit priests who visited here in 1629 on their way to Tibet.

Expansion and restoration of the dzong was performed by the third Druk Desi, Mingyur Tenpa, in the 1670s after Tibetan invaders attacked it in 1630. It has been enlarged and restored many times since, most recently by a Japanese team of builders and architects.