



Kayaking and Rafting in Bhutan

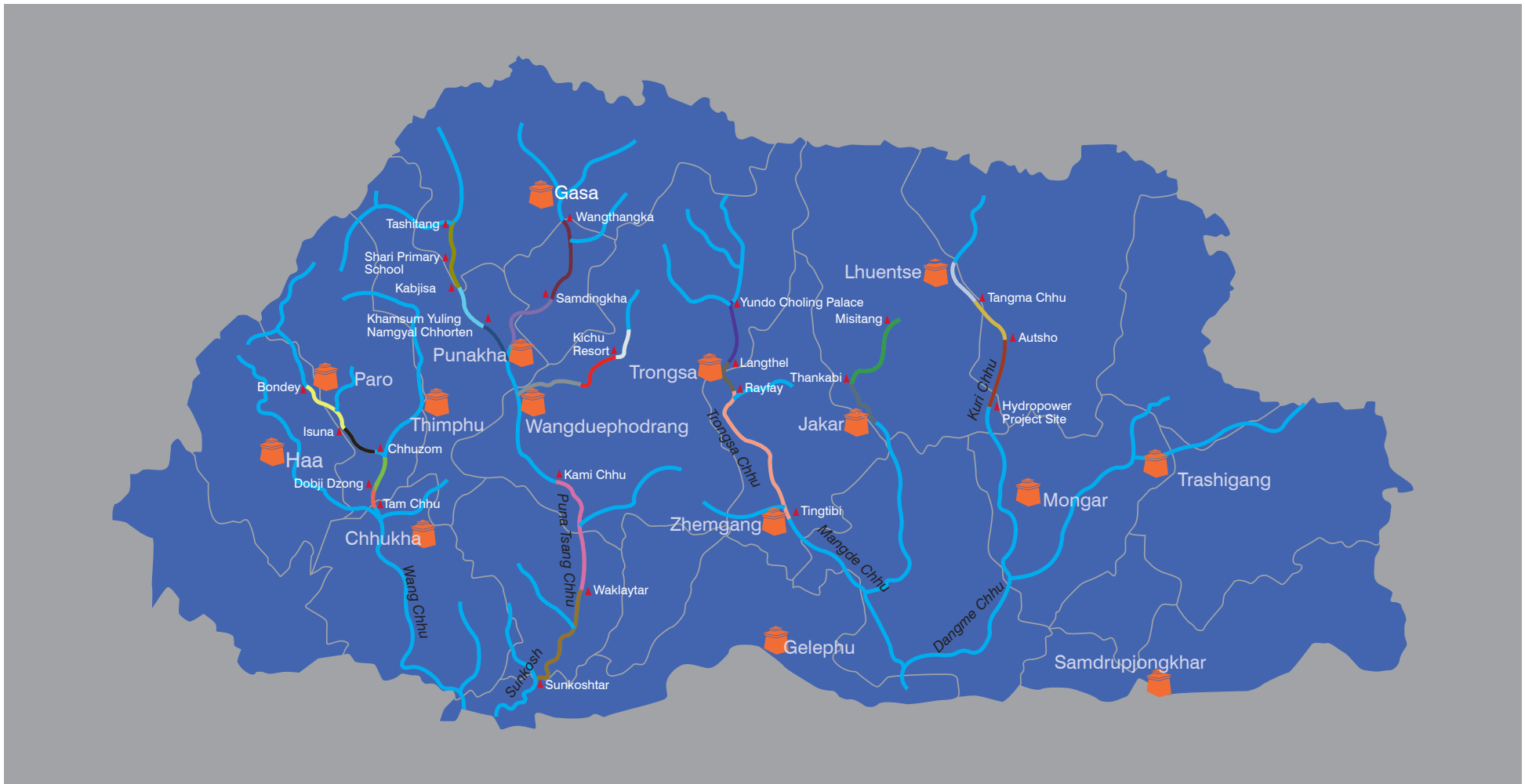
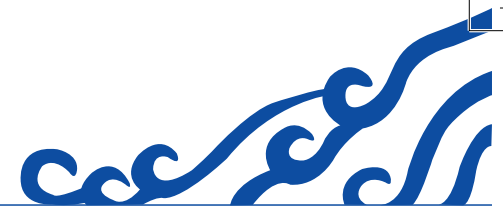
The clean and clear rivers of Bhutan are one of the kingdom's best kept open secrets. Fed by the Eastern Himalayas, the six rivers (Wang Chhu, Sunkosh, Puna Tsang Chhu, Mangde Chhu, Kuri Chhu and Dangme Chhu and their tributaries) have been scouted for kayaking and rafting. They cut through high valleys and low plains to meet up with the Brahmaputra river in India. The natural setting and the sheer variety of the rivers' courses makes up for a unique opportunity to explore Bhutan's beautiful wilderness. It is more than a teaser and an invitation to anyone interested in adventure travels. The rivers are plentiful with high currents and depths reaching a maximum of about five meters; at places it passes gently on and in others the rivers rage through loudly, dominating the environs. Although adventure sports and tourism are relatively recent introductions, it is gaining on in popularity. The sport offers something for everyone: There is easy rafting for beginners and hair-raising runs for the veterans. Besides the rafts and the kayaks, Bhutanese agents also organize walking and trekking expeditions along the scenic river banks.

The best time for rafting and kayaking is from March to April and November to December.

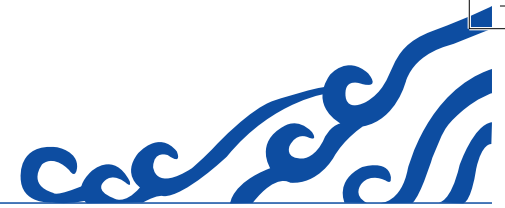


A group of tourists start off a raft in the Puna Tsang

Some of the identified river rafting and kayaking routes



- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Bondey bridge - Isuna bridge | Tashitang - Pho Chhu confluence | Kichu Resort - 5km downstream | Rayfay - Tingtibi |
| Isuna bridge - Chhuzom | Shari Pry. School - Kabjisa | 5 km upstream - Puna Tsang Chhu confluence | Thankabi - Jakar |
| Chhuzom - Dobji Dzong | Kabjisa - Khamsum Yuling Namgyal Chhorten | Kami Chhu - Waklaytar | Misitang - Jakar |
| Dobji Dzong - Tam Chhu | Khamsum Yuling - Pho Chhu confluence | Waklaytar - Sunkoshtar | Lhuentse - Tangma Chhu |
| Wangthangka - Samdingkha | Wangduephodrang Downstream - Kichu Resort | Yundo Choling Palace - Langthel | Tangma Chhu - Autsho |
| Samdingkha - Mo Chhu confluence | | Langthel - Rayfay | Autsho - Hydropower Project Site |



All references to water levels are estimated and in cubic feet per second (CFS).

Safety

Bhutanese rafting and kayaking guides are well trained and will do everything to ensure that you enjoy the adventures minus the risks.

- The rivers of Bhutan were first graded for water sports in 1997 by the experienced duo Gerry Mofatt and Peter Knowles at the invitation of the Royal Government, under the erstwhile Department of Tourism to survey potential routes
- They trained the first batch of Bhutanese river-guides and conducted surveys
- Since then, other rivers have been surveyed including the Punatsang Chhu, Manas and Arno Chhu
- TCB guidelines ensure that all operators use well maintained professional equipment and a reasonable guide-client ratio

Rivers Wild

Paro

This fertile valley is about a 45-minute drive away from the capital Thimphu. It is one of the most historic valleys in Bhutan. Both trade goods and invading Tibetans came over the pass at the head of the valley, giving Paro the closest cultural connection with Tibet of any Bhutanese district. Now it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the kingdom. The valley is home to an array of important cultural sites such as:

- Taktsang, or Tiger's Nest, Bhutan's most recognizable monastery
- Kichu Lhakhang, which along with Jambay Lhakhang in Bumthang is the oldest temple in Bhutan, dating back to the 7th century



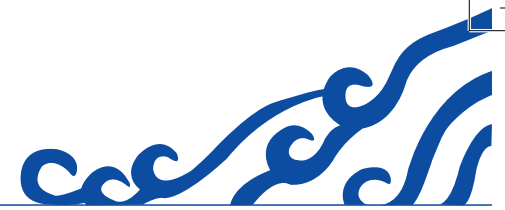
- Drukgyel Dzong, (Victorious Fortress) at the upper end of the valley, was built to commemorate Bhutan's victory over Gushri Khan and his Tibetan allies. The ruins are still as impressive as the original fortress was. A fire razed the dzong in the 1950s
- Paro Town, the single market town that is booming (by Bhutanese standards) due to an influx of tourist dollars
- Rimpung Dzong, also known as Paro Dzong, the massive fortress/monastery which is also the administrative centre of the district. Scenes from the movie Little Buddha were filmed in and around this dzong
- The National Museum of Bhutan, where Bhutan's documented history is displayed. The museum itself, in a conical shape, draws the first curiosity. A new complex was recently built to house the growing items

Paro is also home to the only airport in the kingdom; a beautiful small green-roofed facility served only by Drukair (Bhutan's National Airline).

The Paro Chhu cuts the main valley in half.



A view to a thrill: Paro Chhu flanked by Paro Dzong and Ta-Dzong



Paro Chhu (Bondey - Isuna Bridge)



Location:

Paro Valley, Western Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 10 km (3 hours)

Difficulty:

Class III-IV

Flow:

About 500 cfs

Season:

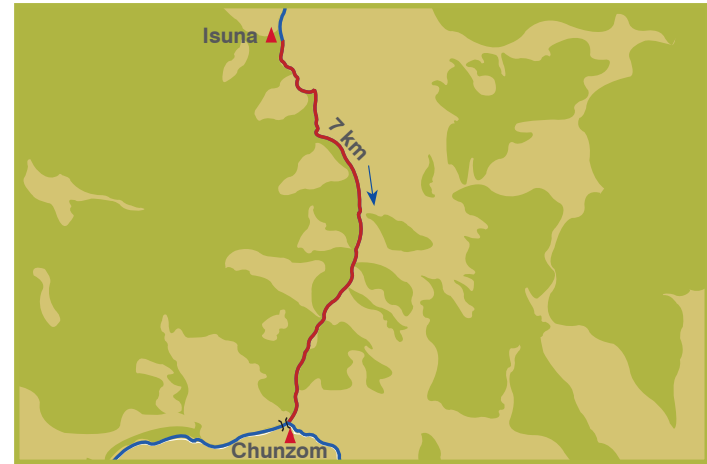
March - April

Craft:

Kayaks recommended due to narrow and steep rapids



Lower Paro Chhu (Isuna Bridge - Chhuzom)



Location:

Paro Valley, Western Bhutan

Length:

7 km (1 hour)

Difficulty:

Class II - III, with one V

Flow:

Approximately 500 cfs

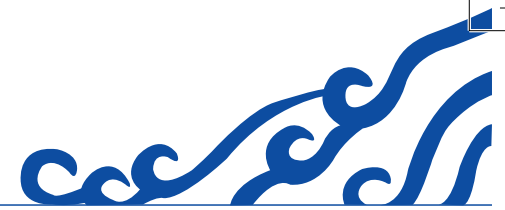
Season:

March-April

Craft:

Kayaks (too small for rafts)





Thimphu

Less than an hour's drive away from Paro airport, the capital of Bhutan, with a population of approximately 100,000 people, lies at an elevation of 2,320m. As you enter the valley you drive on Bhutan's first two-lane expressway straight into the heart of the city. Places to visit in Thimphu include the Textile Museum, the Folk Heritage Museum, the Tashichho Dzong, the National Memorial Chhorten (a stupa dedicated to the third king of Bhutan), and the Centenary Farmer's Market - a colourful market full of local produce and handicrafts. Visitors can visit numerous monasteries around the valley as well as a vibrant nunnery.

The Wang Chhu or the Thimphu River snakes its way down at the city's southern end.



As the sun sets, shadows and light come to play in the capital, Thimphu

Wang Chhu - Upper Run (Chhuzom Confluence - Lower Tam Chhu, Dobji Dzong)



Location:

Thimphu/Paro/Phuentsholing Highway, Western Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 4 km (2 hours)

Difficulty:

Class IV, one class V

Flow:

800 -1000 cfs

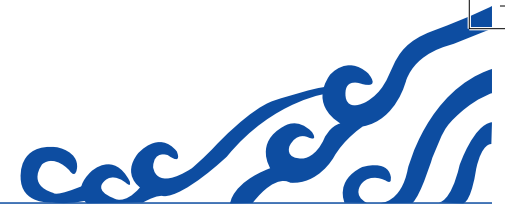
Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: a high water in this section is extremely dangerous. Not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Only Kayaks





Wang Chhu - Lower Run (Tam Chhu - 4 km Downstream)



Location:

Thimphu/Paro/Phuentsholing Highway, Western Bhutan

Length:

4 km (1 hour)

Difficulty:

Class III

Flow:

800 -1000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Tips: a high water run is possible with good scouting)

Craft:

Kayaks, Rafts

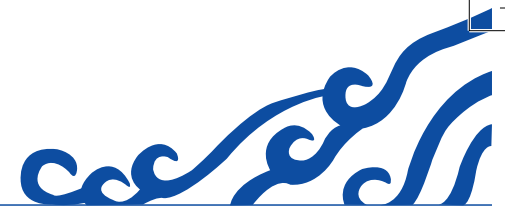
Punakha

Punakha, the old capital, is a pleasant sub-tropical valley. It is home to the impressive Pungthang Dewachenphoi Phodrang Dzong- the administrative and religious center of the district. In Winter it is home to the Bhutanese Central Monk Body. Since the 1680s the dzong has been the site of a continuous vigil over the earthly body of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the founder of the country, which lies in a special chamber in the dzong. Built by Shabdrung Ngwang Namgyal in the 17th century, the fortress stands at the confluence of two rivers- the Pho (male) Chhu and Mo (female) Chhu rivers.



Punakha Dzong: rafters paddling downstream from the Puna Tsang Chhu





Upper Pho Chhu (Wangthangka - Samdingkha)



Location:

Punakha Valley, Western Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 7 km (2 hours)

Difficulty:

Class III-IV

Flow:

2000 -3000 cfs

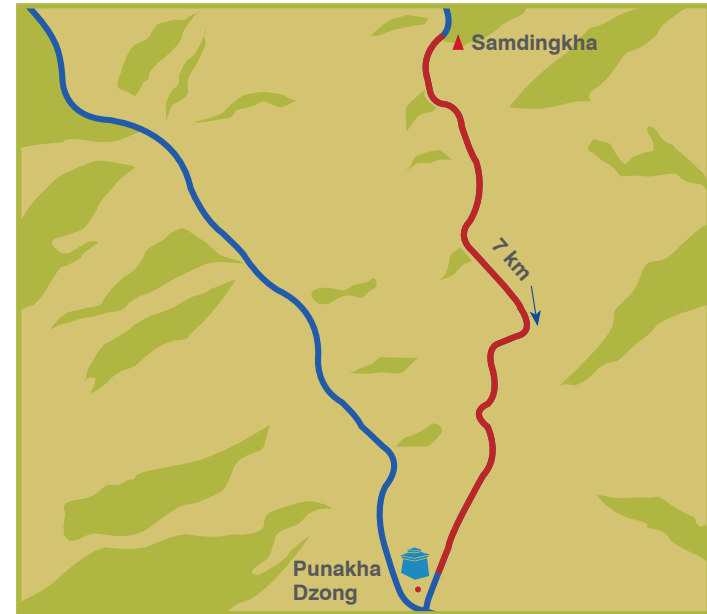
Season:

March - April, October - November

Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts

Lower Pho Chhu (Samdingkha - Below Punakha Dzong)



Location:

Punakha Valley, Western Bhutan

Length:

7km, (1.5 hours)

Difficulty:

Class III with one IV at the bottom

Flow:

2000 -3000 cfs

Season:

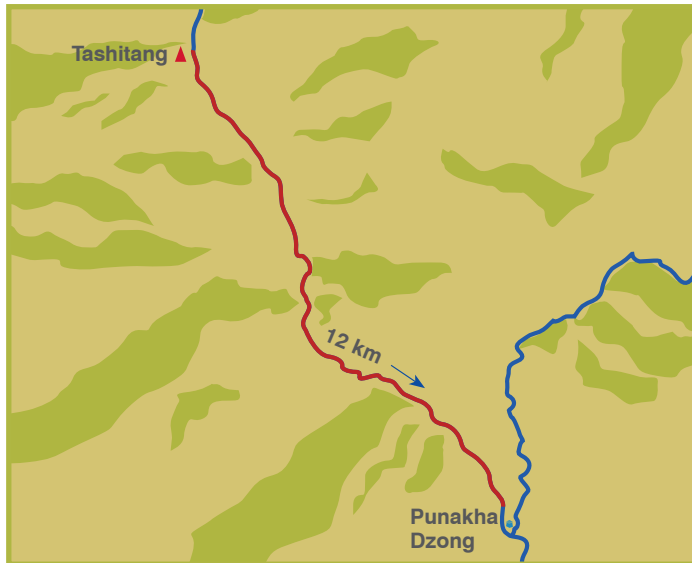
March - April, October - November (Tips: runs at high water possible)

Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts



Mo Chhu - Tashitang Devil's Gorge Section (Tashithang - Below Punakha Dzong)



Location:

Punakha Valley, Western Bhutan

Length:

12 km, 5-7 hours with scouting

Difficulty:

Class V

Flow:

1000 cfs

Season:

Feb/Dec. (Caution: higher than medium flows makes this run dangerous. High water runs not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Kayaks only (too steep for rafts)

Mo Chhu - Upper Run (14km above Punakha Dzong - Kabjisa)



Location:

Punakha Valley, Western Bhutan

Length:

3 km (1.5 hours with scouting)

Difficulty:

Class IV-V

Flow:

1500 - 2000 cfs

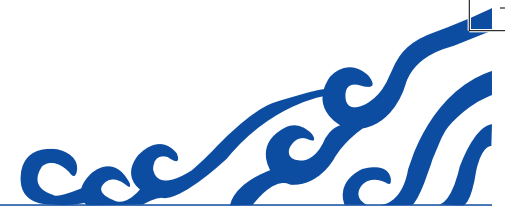
Season:

Mar-Apr, Nov-Dec

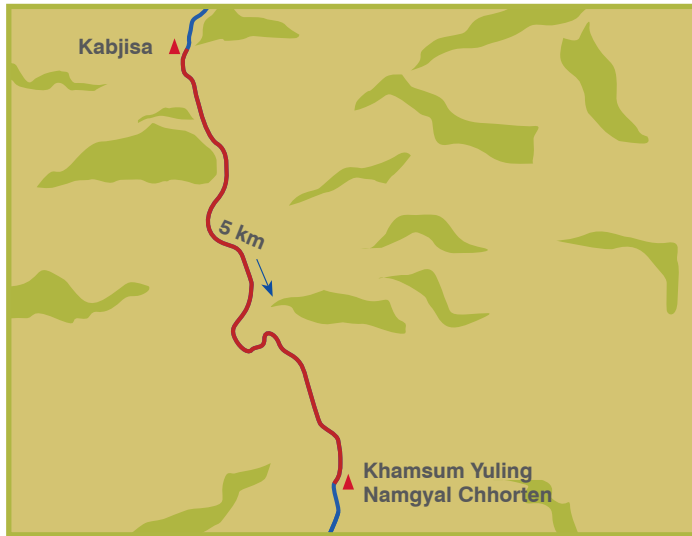
Craft:

Kayaks only





Kabjisa - Khamsum Yuling Namgyal Chhorten



Location:

Punakha Valley, Western/Central Bhutan

Length:

5 km (1.5 hours)

Difficulty:

Class III - IV

Flow:

1500 - 2000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Tips: with good scouting, runs at higher flows possible)

Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts

Lower Mo Chhu (Khamsum Yuling Namgyal Chhorten - Below Punakha Dzong)



Location:

Punakha Valley, Western/Central Bhutan

Length:

6 km (1 hour) (Note: In Spring, high winds and small currents makes this stretch longer and harder)

Difficulty:

Class I - II

Flow:

800 -1000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Tips: with good scouting, runs at higher flows possible)

Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts



Wangduephodrang

This is also the name of the dzong (built in 1638) which dominates the district and the name of the small market town outside the gates of the dzong. The name was given by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal who was searching for the best location for a dzong to prevent incursions from the south. At the chosen spot, the Shabdrung encountered a boy named Wangdue playing beside the river and hence named the dzong "Wangdue's Palace."

There are three main roads in Wangduephodrang. The Lateral Road enters from the west at the Dochu La Pass, crosses the Puna Tsang Chhu at Wangduephodrang Dzong, and continues east to Trongsa. A spur road heads north from Wangduephodrang to the dzong at Punakha and slightly beyond. This road eventually becomes the trail to Gasa. A second spur departs the Lateral Road near the Pele La pass halfway between Wangduephodrang and Trongsa, travelling south a short distance to Gangtey monastery and the Phobjikha valley where the rare Black-necked Cranes come to roost in the winter.



The pleasant rapids of the Puna Tsang Chhu is a popular local and tourist favorite

Upper Dang Chhu (Wangduephodrang Downstream - Kichu Resort)



Location:

Wangduephodrang, Western/Central Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 3 km (2 hours with scouting)

Difficulty:

Class IV -V at medium flows, V -V at higher flows

Flow:

400-500 cfs

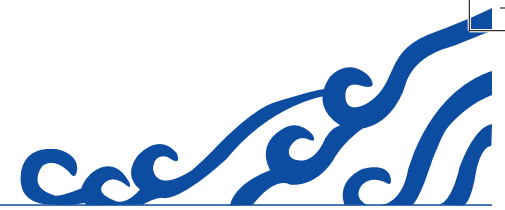
Season:

March - April, October - November (Caution: high water makes this run dangerous. Not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Kayaks only (too small and steep for rafts)





Middle Dang Chhu (Kichu Resort - Dang Chhu Downstream)



Location:

Wangduephodrang, Western/Central Bhutan

Length:

5 km (1.5 hours)

Difficulty:

Class IV with three class V scouts

Flow:

400 - 500 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December

Craft:

Kayaks. (Tips: rafts possible but only with crew and portages. It is time consuming but there are great runs at stretches)

Lower Dang Chhu (Wangduephodrang Upstream - Puna Tsang Chhu Confluence)



Location:

Wangduephodrang, Western/Central Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 5km (1 hour)

Difficulty:

Class III+

Flow:

Class IV with 3 Class V scouts (Tips: runs possible at high water if the first section is scouted carefully and the paddlers are strong)

Season:

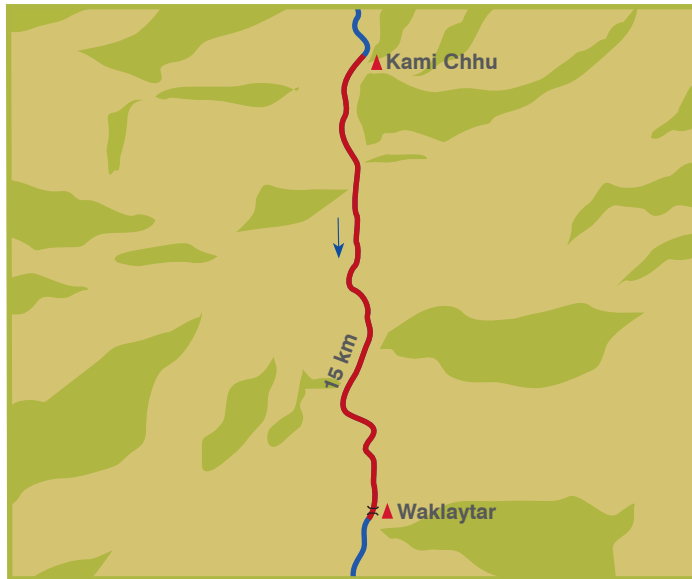
March - April, November - December

Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts



Puna Tsang Chhu - The Canyon (Kami Chhu - Waklaytar)



Location:

Wangduephodrang, Western/Central Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 15 km (4 hours in kayaks with scouting, longer for rafts due to portages)

Difficulty:

Class IV-V at low to medium flows, solid vat-high flows

Flows:

5000 - 7000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: a high water on this stretch can be extremely difficult. Not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Kayaks. (Rafting possible with strong crews)

Puna Tsang Chhu - Waklaytar to Sunkoshtar



Location:

Wangduephodrang, Western/Central Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 17 km (4 hours)

Difficulty:

Class III-IV at most flows

Flows:

5000 - 7000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Tips: high water makes this run more difficult but reasonable as well)

Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts



Trongsa

About a four-hour drive from Wangduephodrang is the central district of Trongsa, at an elevation of 2,000 m. It is the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family and from where the first two kings ruled the kingdom. It was considered the most strategic of Bhutan's districts.

The resplendent Trongsa Dzong can be seen about 20 km before you actually reach it. Its labyrinth of temples, corridors, offices and living quarters for the monks add up to a masterpiece in Bhutanese architecture that has been beautifully preserved.



© Tashi Loday

The Mangde Chhu is known for some exciting bends and falls

Mangde Chhu - Upper Section (Yundo Choling Palace - Langthel)



Location:

Trongsa, Central Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 5 km (2 hours with scouting)

Difficulty:

Class IV

Flows:

Approximately 3000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December

Craft:

Kayaks



Mangde Chhu - Ema Datsi Canyon (Langthel - Rayfay)



Location:

Trongsa, Central Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 7 km (3 hours with scouting)

Difficulty:

Pool drop class III-IV at medium flows

Flows:

Approximately 3000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: high water makes this section very dangerous. Not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Only Kayaks

Ema Datsi Canyon - Kevorkian Canyon (Rayfay - Tingtibi)



Location:

Trongsa, Central Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 50 km (2-river days)

Difficulty:

Class V -VI at low to medium flows

Flows:

Approximately 3000 cfs

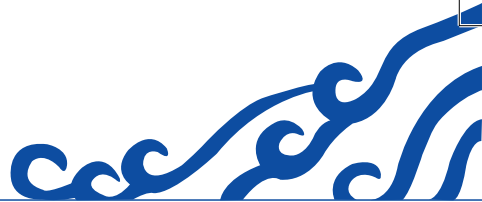
Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: high water runs not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Only Kayaks





Bumthang

Bumthang is one of the 20 districts comprising Bhutan. It is the most historic dzongkhag if the number of ancient temples and sacred sites were to be accounted. Bumthang is made up of the four main valleys of Ura, Chumey, Tang and Choekor- although all the valleys are generally referred to as Bumthang.

Bumthang's main claims to fame, besides its Swiss like landscape, are buckwheat, dairy, honey and apples among other products.

The language spoken in the Bumthang district is known as Bumthangkha, although each of the four valleys have their own dialects.

Cultural and historic sites in the district include:

- Mebar Tso (Burning Lake), where sacred scriptures hidden by Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century were later recovered by Pema Lingpa, the treasure revealer, in the 15th century
- Kurje Monastery
- Jakar Dzong, the administrative and monastic headquarters
- Jambay Lhakhang, one of the two most ancient temples of



The great outdoors: A calm Chamkhar Chhu flows amidst lush greenery

Bhutan, built in the 7th century by Songtsen Gampo, the legendary king of Tibet

- Tamshing Lhakhang, a prominent Nyingmapa temple in the country

Chamkar Chhu (Thangbi - Jakar)



Location:

Bumthang, Central Bhutan

Length:

5 km (1 hour)

Difficulty:

Class II -III

Flows:

1500 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December

Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts



Tang Chhu (Misitang - Jakar)



Location:

Bumthang, Central Bhutan

Length:

10 km (2 hours)

Difficulty:

Class III -IV (includes one of the world's only class VI cases of flatwater)

Flows:

300 -500 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: high water runs not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Only Kayaks (Tips: the rapids in the lower section are too narrow to allow a raft to pass. Portaging is not an option)

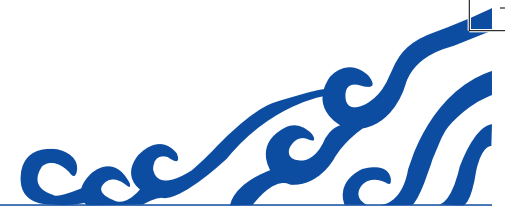
Lhuentse

Located in the northeast, Lhuentse is one of the least developed districts of Bhutan. There are few roads. The first gas station was opened as recently as September 2005, electricity is not well distributed and the terrain makes distribution of social welfare difficult. Despite its favourable climate, farming is also hindered by the difficult infrastructure. Notwithstanding, it is the ancient home of the Royal Family and the region is renowned for its weaving skills. The kingdom's finest traditional attires are woven here with an artistic bent that has been preserved for centuries. The area is also a bastion of spiritualism. It attracts seekers and practitioners of the path who dwell in the quiet, serene and isolated parts of the region.



Lhuentse Dzong: the remote region is well known for its pleasant climates





Kuri Chhu - Upper Run (Lhuentse - Tangma Chhu)



Location:

Lhuentse, Central-Eastern Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 14 km (3 hours)

Difficulty:

IV for the first 7 km, class V -VI after that

Flows:

4000 -6000

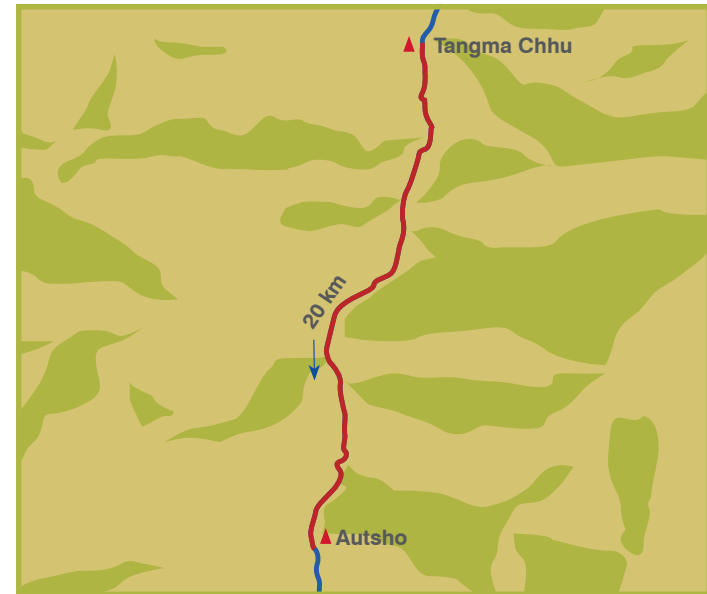
Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: High water runs not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Kayaks only (Tips: the long portages and big rapids in the lower canyon makes this impossible for rafts)

Kuri Chhu - Middle Run (Bottom of the Upper Canyon - Autsho Village South)



Location:

Lhuentse, Central-Eastern Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 20 km, 3-4 hours

Difficulty:

Class IV-IV+ with a couple class Vs

Flows:

4000 -6000 cfs

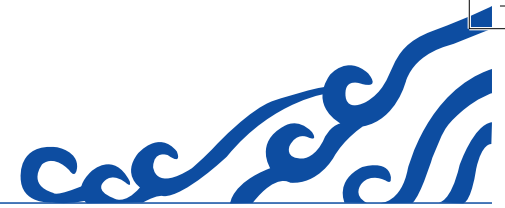
Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: high water runs not recommended for amateurs)

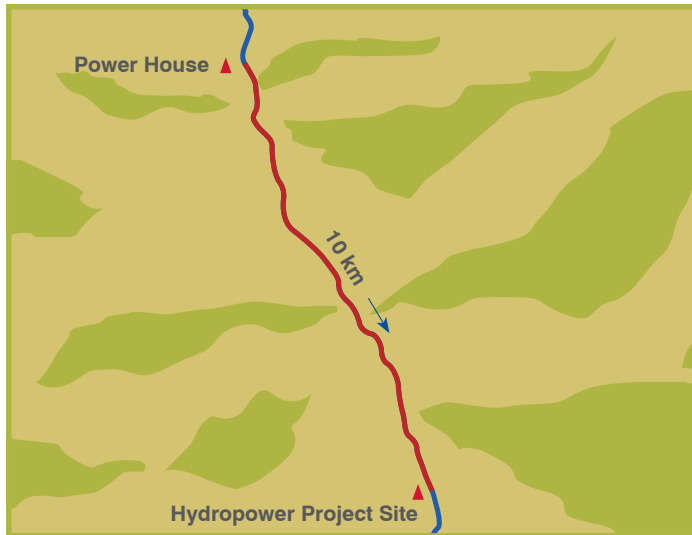
Craft:

Kayaks and Rafts





Kuri Chhu - Lower Run (Power House - Hydropower Project Site)



Location:

Lhuentse, Central-Eastern Bhutan

Length:

Approximately 10 km (1 hour)

Difficulty:

Class III

Flows:

4000 -6000 cfs

Season:

March - April, November - December (Caution: high water runs not recommended for amateurs)

Craft:

Rafts and Kayaks



Meandering through some spectacular courses, the rivers of Bhutan are clean, clear, wild and wondrous





© Tashi Lodgy

The beautifully renovated Punakha Dzong flanked by the Mo Chhu