

= Punakha Dzong =

The Punakha Dzong , also known as Pungtang Dechen Photrang Dzong (meaning very awesome dzong " the palace of great happiness or bliss ") , is the administrative centre of Punakha District in Punakha , Bhutan . Constructed by Ngawang Namgyal , 1st Zhabdrung Rinpoche , in 1637 ? 38 , it is the second oldest and second largest dzong in Bhutan and one of its most majestic structures . The dzong houses the sacred relics of the southern Drukpa Lineage of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism , including the Rangjung Kasarpani and the sacred remains of Ngawang Namgyal and the tertön Pema Lingpa .

Punakha Dzong was the administrative centre and the seat of the Government of Bhutan until 1955 , when the capital was moved to Thimphu . It is listed as a tentative site in Bhutan 's Tentative List for UNESCO inclusion .

= = Geography = =

The Dzong is located at the confluence of the Pho Chhu (father) and Mo Chhu (mother) rivers in the Punakha ? Wangdue valley . The source of the Mo chu river is in the northern hills of Lighsi and Laya in Bhutan , and in Tibet . The Po Chu River is fed by glaciers in the Lunana region of the Punakha valley . After the confluence of these two rivers , the main river is known as Puna Tsang chu or Sankosh River and flows down through Wangdue Phodrang , crosses the Bhutan ? India border at Kalikhola and eventually meets the Brahmaputra River .

In view of the healthy climate in the region , Punakha is the winter capital of Bhutan . The head of the clergy of Bhutan with his entourage of monks spend the winter in this dzong . Jacaranda trees grow around the dzong , blooming with mauve flowers in the spring .

= = History = =

According to a local legend , the sage Padmasambhava prophesized that ? a person named Namgyal will arrive at a hill that looks like an elephant ? . Ngawang Namgyal , 1st Zhabdrung Rinpoche , found the peak of the hill , which appeared in the shape of trunk of an elephant as prophesized , and built the dzong in 1637 @-@ 38 .

Another legend tells how Zowe Palep , the architect , had a vision in a dream after the Zhabdrung ordered him to sleep under a small structure which contained a statue of the Buddha , known as Dzong Chug " small dzong " . In his dream , prompted by the psychic powers of the Zhabdrung , he had a clear vision of a palace for Guru Rinpoche . The vision was imprinted on the architect 's mind , enabling him to conceive the plan for the dzong without putting the vision on paper and to build it . On the basis of the dream vision of the architect , the building of the dzong was started in 1637 and completed in 1638 , at the place where the Dzong Chug had existed . During this period , Ngawang Namgyal became the first leader of a unified Bhutan , following his concerted efforts to unify the country into one unit .

The dzong was consecrated in the name of Pungthang Dechen Phodrang . In 1639 , a commemorative chapel was erected to house the arms seized from the Tibetans who were defeated by the Bhutanese on this spot . The Zhabdrung also set up a monastic order with 600 monks (brought from Cheri Gumpa of upper Thimphu valley) and he lived here till his death .

The spire at the top of the utse (the dzong ? s central tower or the main tower) was added in 1676 by Gyaltsen Tenzin Rabgye ? the abbot of the dzong . Further additions were made during the period 1744 to 1763 , when Sherab Wangchuk was the ruler . A large thangka known as chenma (great) thoundral of the Zhabdrung was donated to the Dzong by the Desi (ruler) . This thangka is displayed during the tshechu held once a year here . The 7th Dalai Lama donated the brass roof for the dzong .

The House of Wangchuck currently rules the country . This monarchy was established in 1907 . The same year , Punakha Dzong was the site of the coronation of Ugyen Wangchuck (or Deb Nagpo) as the first Druk Gyalpo . At that time , Punakha was the capital of Bhutan . Three years

later , a treaty was signed at Punakha whereby the British agreed not to interfere in Bhutanese internal affairs and Bhutan allowed Britain to direct its foreign affairs .

From 1744 to 1763 , the dzong was enlarged substantially during the rule of the 13th desi , when Sherab Wangchuk was the chief abbot of Bhutan . Several fires between 1750 and 1849 caused damages to the Dzong . In the 1897 earthquake , the dzong was severely damaged and also suffered numerous fires . In 1986 , the dzong was partially destroyed by fire

= = = Royal wedding = = =

The wedding of the Druk Gyalpo , Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck , and his fiancée , Jetsun Pema , was held at the Punakha Dzong on 13 October 2011 .

= = Architecture = =

The dzong is part of the Drukpa Lineage of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism in Bhutan . It is the second oldest and most majestic dzong in Bhutan built at the orders of Ngawang Namgyal . It is a six @-@ storied structure with a central tower or utse at an average elevation of 1 @,@ 200 metres (3 @,@ 900 ft) with a scenic , mountainous background . The materials used in building the Dzong consisted of compacted earth , stones and timber in doors and windows .

The dzong was constructed as an ? embodiment of Buddhist values ? and was one of the 16 dzongs built by the Zhabdrung during his rule from 1594 to 1691 . The dzong measures 180 metres (590 ft) in length with a width of 72 metres (236 ft) and has three docheys (courtyards) . The defensive fortifications built in the dzong to protect it from enemy attacks consist of a steep wooden draw stairway and a heavy wooden door that is closed at night . After the dzong suffered damage due to a fire , a large prayer hall was added in 1986 .

Administrative offices of the dzong , a very large , white @-@ washed stupa and a bodhi tree are located in the first courtyard . Also seen in the same courtyard , on the far left , are a mound of stones and a chapel dedicated to the queen of the n?gas . The residential quarters of monks are located in the second courtyard , with the utse intervening in between the first and the second courtyards . There are two historic halls in this courtyard ; one of Ugyen Wangchuk , who subsequently became the King and another hall where the King was decorated in 1905 with the Order of the Knight Commander of the Indian Empire by John Claude White . The third courtyard is at the southernmost end of the dzong where the remains of Pema Lingpa and Ngawang Namgyal are preserved . Machey Lakhang (' machey ' literally means " sacred embalmed body ") in the third courtyard has the well preserved embalmed body of Zhabdrung . This Lakhang was rebuilt in 1995 . The casket containing the embalmed body is not opened at all . However , the place is visited by the King and the Je Khenpo mainly to seek blessings before assuming their offices .

Flash floods resulting from glacial lake outburst flooding in the upper reaches of the valley , are a common occurrence in the Mo Chu and Pho Chu rivers , and in the past caused flooding and damage to the dzong , especially in 1957 , 1960 and 1994 . Fires and earthquakes have also further added to the problem . In 1996 , flash floods in the Pho Chu river damaged the large stupa and caused several deaths .

After a major refurbishing work carried out in the " zorig chusum tradition " (an ancient tradition of crafts in wood carving , masonry , metal work , painting , and several other skills) , the Dzong now has several new Lhakhangs , over 200 new religious images , and several other treasures . A consecration ceremony known as the ? Rabney ceremony ? performed by His Holiness the Je Khenpo and the monks of the Dratshang (central monk body) was held from May 13 to 15 , 2004 , corresponding to the 12th to 14th day of the third Bhutanese month . The restoration works were largely funded by the Government of India and the Dzong stands fully restored to its past glory . After complete restoration of the Dzong to its old glory , notable images , statues and thangkas are displayed in the Dzong . These include murals depicting life story of Buddha done during the rule of the second druk desi . Large gilded statues of Buddha , Guru Rinpoche and Zhabdrung which belong to mid 18th century , and gilded panels on pillars are also here .

A covered wooden cantilever bridge crossing the Mo Chu river was built together with the Dzong in the 17th century . This bridge was washed away by a flash flood in 1957 . In 2006 , work started on a new wooden cantilever bridge in the traditional style , with a free span of 55 metres (180 ft) . It was completed in 2008 . In 2008 , after completion of the cantilever bridge , the new bridge was hailed as a celebration of ? 100 years of Wangchuck Monarchy in 2008 and to the coronation of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in the Punakha Dzong ? . Thus , the Dzong has been the venue for coronation of all the kings of Bhutan . A memorial honouring the 23 people who died in the dzong in the glacial floods in 1994 has also been erected just outside the dzong .

= = Festivals = =

Demoche is the annual festival held at the Dzong , which is largely attended by people from all villages and far places of the district . The ranghung " self @-@ created " image of Avalokite?vara enshrined in the utse of the dzong (brought by the Zhabdrung from Tibet) is displayed during the festival . During this five @-@ day festival , also known as Punakha festival , held in February / March , there are some very impressive displays . The important display is a re @-@ enactment of the Tibetan invasion of Bhutan in 1639 where the Tibetans were defeated . In this theatrical display , which was conceived by the Zhamdrung , a mock throwing of a relic to the Mo chu river is dramatized .

The final day of the festival marks the display of an image of Zhabdrung followed by a group dance performance by 136 people , dressed as warriors , in the main courtyard . At the end of the performance , the dancers descend down the front entrance of the dzong in revelry ? whistling and shouting . The Monks led by the Je Khenpo of the Dzong then parade to the Mo chu river bank with lot of fan fare . Je Khenpo then flings oranges into the river marking the Rangjung Kharsapani , which is considered an offering to the n?gas residing below the river bed . After this act , the traditional mask dances commemorating the construction of the Dzong are performed in the Dzong premises .

Another ritual observed every year at this dzong is called the Lhenkey Dungchhur , and is a worship for departed souls .

Current Festivals

Pel Khorlo Dompai Wangchen (Charkrasamva)