



## Buddhist Travelling in Sikkim

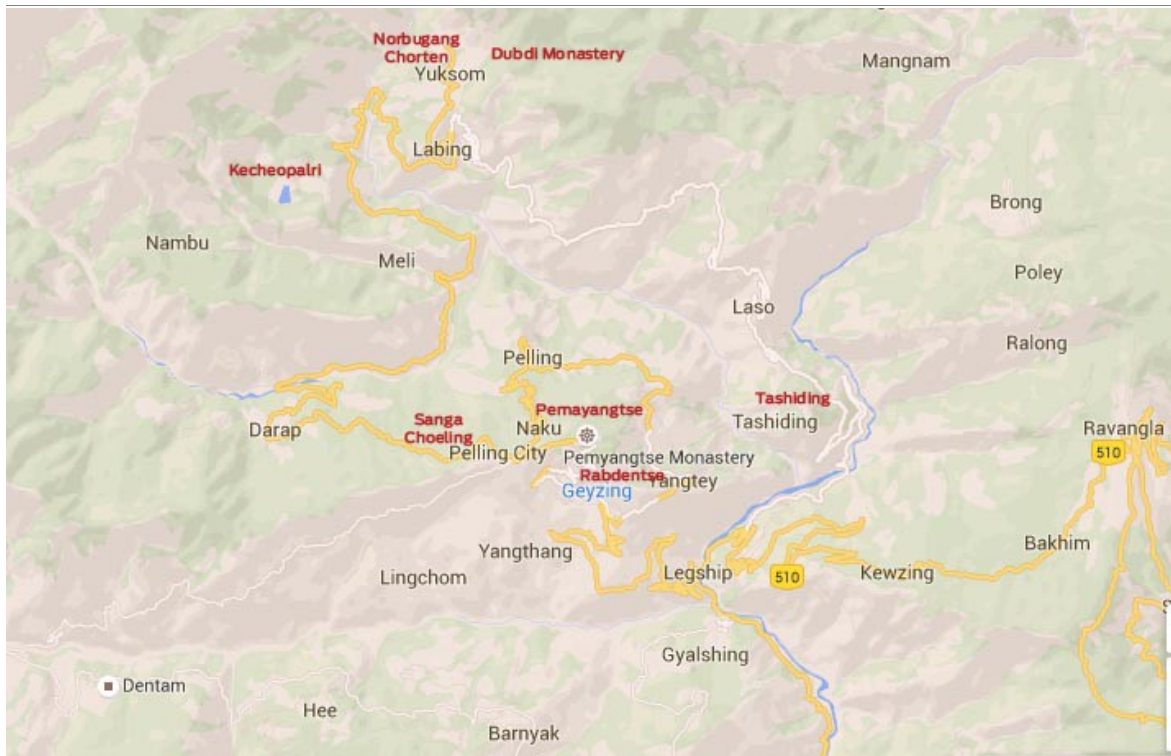
There are few countries ruled by a religious king – Sikkim was one of these. The function of the Chogyal (= Dharmaking) was established in 1641. At that time three monks under the leadership of Lhatsun Chenpo followed the prediction of the great tantric Guru Padmasambhava and met in Norbugang, a plateau in today's Yuksom. They meditated and found a suitable man, called Phuntsog. They gave him the noble name of Namgyal to accompany his name and crowned him as the first Chogyal of the newly found kingdom of Sikkim with the capital in Yuksom. They also ordered that Buddhism would be the religion for everyone to follow and Nyingma the Buddhist order to be the ruling one.

At that time mostly Lepcha and Bhutia people lived within the borders of this new kingdom, the first one practising a mixture of Buddhism and their old animistic beliefs and the second being Buddhists already. The population was small, the steep mountain slopes covered by thick forests and all towered above by the holy mountain of Kangchendzonga.

But it was not easy for these people to live in peace and harmony as the neighbouring countries wanted to expand and there were wars which led to changing borderlines. Already the second Chogyal had to shift the capital from Yuksom to Rabdentse in 1670 being a safer place. In 1975 Sikkim could not keep its independence and became the youngest state of India. Nowadays the majority of the Sikkimese people are from Nepali origin and Hinduism is the mostly practised religion.

But despite the political quarrels Buddhism was flowering since the beginning and more and more monasteries were founded. Most are Nyingma Monasteries, but you can find also a Bon-Monastery and the Rumtek-Monastery, being the mother-place of the Karmapa and belonging to the Drukpa order.

There is a Buddhist pilgrimage trail which you can follow exclusively or combine with other places of interest. Following places belong to it: Norbugang Chorten, Dubdi Monastery, Pemayangtse Monastery, Rabdentse, Sanga Choeling Monastery, Kecheopalri Lake and Tashiding Monastery. These places give an interesting insight into Sikkim's history same as the today's situation. We can imagine a little the life 350 years ago and get knowledge about the turbulent history of Sikkim. We can think about a country, where politics and religion goes hand in hand. And we can learn more about Buddhism in general and the Nyingma order in particular. Guru Padmasambhava gave much influence to this branch of Buddhism. And for sure, if you want, you can combine this tour with the practise of meditation, Dharma-talks and readings.



### Travelling Notes

As the places are quite close together one doesn't need much time to see them all. You can combine this tour with other buddhist dominated sightseeing in Sikkim and the Darjeeling area, lay an emphasis on meeting people of different origins and share their daily life or get a better knowledge about the huge biodiversity of Sikkim. Trekking is another good way to spend time in Sikkim either just enjoying the spectacular landscape or continue buddhist practise by walking slowly trying to concentrate only on the doing. Some places of the buddhist trail can be combined by walking, too.

**We will create your own Sikkim-Buddhism-Tour!**



### Norbugang Chorten

The Norbugang Chorten was built at the place where the first Chogyal of Sikkim was crowned. The three monks collected soil and stones from all parts of Sikkim and built the Chorten around lots of gifts the people gave generous for this special occasion. 21 days took the celebration of



inauguration the Chorten. Today it is surrounded by a beautiful peaceful park full of prayerflags. On the site is also the coronation throne and a footprint of Lhatsun Chenpo.



### **Dubdi Monastery**

This was the first monastery in Sikkim as it is the place where Lama Lhatsun Chenpo used to meditate in solitude. It was established in 1701 high above the village of Yuksom and one has to walk quite a steep path of 1,2 km through the jungle to reach this peaceful place. There are no monks in that monastery, only a caretaker, who does the rituals and keeps the place clean. Next to it is a monastic school for approx. 20 boys which are happy about visitors. They participated in the Kamerakidz-Project in October 2015 ([www.kamerakidz.com](http://www.kamerakidz.com)).



### **Sanga Choeling Monastery**

This close to Pelling located monastery was also established by Lhatsun Chenpo in the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There is a steep path leading to the monastery from where you get in good weather conditions a beautiful scenic view. On the tenth day of every month according to the Tibetan Calender, lamas recite hymns at this monastery. Every morning and evening prayers are special here.



### **Rabdentse**

In 1670 the capital was shifted by the second Chogyal from Yuksom to Rabdentse. But it only lasted until 1814 and was destroyed by the invading Gurkha army. Today there are only ruins which you reach after an easy 1 km walk through a beautiful forest. It is located on a ridge from which you have a great view.



### **Pemayangtse monastery**

This monastery was also founded by Lhatsun Chenpo in 1705. It is the biggest Nyingma monastery in Sikkim, being the head of all other monasteries. The monks are exceptional all coming from Bhutia origin. The monastery was ment to be for „pure monks” only, meaning that they have to be celibate and not of physical abnormality. The head Lama was the only one in Sikkim having the privilege to anoint the Chogyals with holy water. Every february the monks are performing the Cham dances.





### **Khecheopalri Lake**

This small lake is sacred for buddhists and hindus. They believe it is a wishfulfilling lake. There is no leaf floating on the lake, always quickly picked up by the birds around. There are prayerflags, Chorten, Manistones and a small temple at the shore. There are many fish in the lake well fed by the devotees. One cannot walk around but on a hill to have a beautiful overview of the lake. Lots of legends are told about the lake. There is a trail from Yuksom to Kecheopalri taking approx. 4 hours.



### **Tashiding monastery**

This monastery was found by Ngadak Sempa Chenpo, another of the three monks in 1641 and extended in 1717. Due to its location it is considered the spiritual centre of Sikkim. In February/March there is the Bhumchu Festival, a celebration to predict the future. It is possible to reach the monastery by a footpath from the village below – or even by trekking from Dubdi on a long day.

Other places of interest for the Buddhist are the following:

### **Rumtek**

Rumtek hosts the biggest monastery in Sikkim. It was founded by the 9<sup>th</sup> Karmapa and belongs therefore to the Karma Kagyu Sect. Unfortunately there is a discussion about the „real 17<sup>th</sup>

Karmapa" having two candidates who claim both to be the one. The remains of the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa are stored in a golden Stupa. Nevertheless there is a vivid activity of the monks and the Karma Shri Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies opposite.

### **Kewzing/Ravangla**

Between Ravangla and Ravangla is one of the two recognized Bon monasteries in India located. Bon was the religion dominating in Tibet and surroundings before Buddhism was introduced. It is said that some elements like prayerflags, burning of incense etc. are adopted by Buddhism. It is very interesting to discover the similarities and differences.

### **Namgyal Research Institute of Tibetology**

The capital Gangtok houses this centre of Buddhist Philosophy containing a huge collection of buddhist masks, scriptures, statues and icons. It is also the main important institute which does research in tibetan language and culture.

### **Dzongu**

Dzongu is the heartland of the Lepcha culture which combine an interesting mix of their animistic belief and Buddhism. You can visit small monasteries and with a little luck see some monks performing rituals.

For sure there are more monasteries in Sikkim, some with permanent monks living there, some more or less only used for special rituals.

So to **create your own Sikkim-Buddhism-Tour**, we need to know from you:

- How much time do you have?
- When do you want to travel?
- Do you want to visit special Festivals?
- How many are you to travel together?
- Do you want to focus on Buddhism only or do you have other interests with which you want to combine the Buddhism-Tour?
- Are there special places you want to stay longer/shorter?
- Are you interested to get deeper into buddhist teachings?
- Do you like to have an organised daily routine of meditation and/or Dharma-talk?
- Do you prefer budget, medium or better accommodations?
- What else is important for you?

**Please drop a mail at [info@yangla-tours.de](mailto:info@yangla-tours.de) and we'll talk about your tour!**

