



Chenla Nye Visit Report

Eco-Tourism | Infrastructure | Spiritual Significance

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Background



Chenla Ney is situated in Threlphu Chiwog, within the Kangpar Gewog of Trashigang Dzongkhag. It has an elevation of 4,010 meters above sea level. The journey from the nearest road access point to Chenla Ney takes about 7 hours on foot. This trek requires a significant commitment, as visitors navigate the scenic yet challenging terrain to reach this sacred site. This sacred site is closely linked to Buddhist teachings and is believed to have been blessed by Guru Rinpoche, an important figure in Bhutanese spirituality. Chenla Ney is especially recognized for its association with Drubthob Dongag Rinchen, a notable teacher from **the late 18th century** who played a key role in promoting Buddhist teachings and establishing institutions for the Buddha Dharma. The site is thought to represent the essence of Guru Rinpoche's Zangdopelri, symbolizing a place of spiritual refuge and enlightenment.

Among many other astonishing sites at Chenla Ney, visitors can see the stone seats where Guru Rinpoche and Drubthob Dongag Reychen reportedly had conversations, along with their distinct footprints, which are still visible today. This tangible evidence of their presence enhances the site's spiritual significance, making it a popular pilgrimage destination for many devotees seeking a connection with these esteemed figures.

To enhance the visitor experience at Chenla, the Gewog, Drungkhag, and Dzongkhag Administration are currently working on developing essential infrastructure. This includes building a motorable road, mule track, guesthouse, kitchen, and restroom facilities, supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) amounting to Nu. 6.5 million. The road connectivity from Threlphu Chiwog to Shinangjulu has been successfully completed, improving access to the area. Meanwhile, other related activities are currently in progress and are expected to be completed by June 2025, further enhancing the infrastructure and accessibility of the region.

To assess the current progress of the ongoing infrastructure development activities and explore potential future plans, Dasho Dzongdag from the Trashigang Dzongkhag Administration visited the site. He was accompanied by Dasho Drungpa from Wamrong Drungkhag and Gewog Officials from the Kangpar Gewog Administration. The site visit took place from May 2nd to May 5th. The detailed daily visits are described in the following;

Daily Highlights

2nd May, 2025 (Friday)

Led by Dasho Dzongdag, a group of 34 individuals began the journey from Trashigang to Kangpar Gewog at 1 PM. After about 4 hours of bus travel, the team arrived at Badengphu Chiwog, where they were warmly welcomed by the Gup, Tshokpa, and local villagers with tea and snacks. Following that, the team continued its journey to Threlphu Chiwog, where they planned to spend the night. Along the way, Zorthung Tshokpa and his villagers also welcomed Dasho with tea and snacks. By 7 PM, the team arrived in Threlphu, where they were greeted by the Tshokpa and local villagers, who offered Tshokchang to the Dashos.



3rd May, 2025 (Saturday)

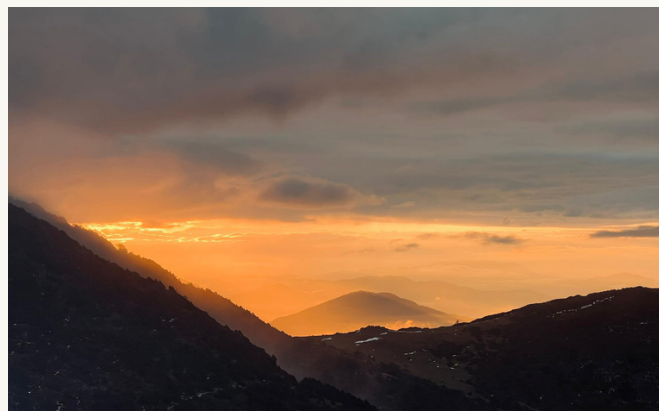
The next morning, at 7 AM, the team, accompanied by seven villagers, eagerly set off for Chenla. At the beginning of the trek, the team encountered Shinangjulu Lake.

Everyone appreciated the natural beauty along the route and thoroughly enjoyed the journey. The team also had the opportunity to see several notable sites along the way. They arrived at the campsite in Chenla by the afternoon. After a brief tea and snack break upon arriving in Chenla, Dasho and the team visited a few nearby pilgrimage sites close to the camp. As dusk approached, everyone settled in for the night, mentally preparing for the next day's activities.



4th May, 2025 (Sunday)

The team woke up as early as 4 AM the following morning to witness the first sunrise, during which it is believed that, if fortunate, one might see Guru Rinpoche appearing with the dawn. Unfortunately, persistent rain and foggy weather obscured this view. After breakfast, the team explored the remaining pilgrimage sites and reached Chenla Peak by the afternoon. After a quick lunch, the team began their descent toward Threlphu in the afternoon. Before that, the Dashos and the relevant stakeholders monitored the ongoing GEF project, the construction of the guesthouse, kitchen and the restroom. Upon arriving in Threlphu, the team had the opportunity to see the sacred relics of Lama Moenlam Rabzang. The day concluded with a brief gathering among the team, Gewog Officials, and a few villagers.



5th May, 2025 (Monday)

On the final day of the visit, the team went to the birthplace of Druptob Dongag Rinchen, also known as Druptob Khijey, in Kangpar. There, they had the opportunity to see several relics associated with the Druptob.

Additionally, the team observed the footprint of Lord Buddha, which was engraved by the Druptob after taking measurements from the Dorji Dhen. This event is how Kangpar got its name.

Afterward, the team visited Lamai Gonpa, the site associated with Lama Moenlam Rabzang, where they viewed several important relics. By noon, the team began their return journey to Trashigang. Along the way, Dasho monitored the ongoing construction of Yonphula Sheydra in Kanglung. The team arrived in Trashigang by 7 PM.



Objective of Visit

The visit to Chenla Nye aimed to assess the progress of initiatives funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to enhance the site's appeal as a premier eco-tourism destination. The focus was on evaluating infrastructure development, identifying additional needs, and promoting sustainable tourism practices that benefit local communities while preserving cultural and environmental integrity. This section outlines the key objectives of the visit.

Monitor GEF-Funded Initiatives and Infrastructure Development:

The primary objective of the visit was to assess the progress of ongoing Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded initiatives along the route from Kangpar to Chenla Nye. This included evaluating the construction of a dedicated pathway for horses, intended to improve accessibility for both visitors and local communities. In addition, the visit aimed to review the development of essential infrastructure at Chenla Nye, comprising a guest house, toilet facilities, and a kitchen. These facilities are considered vital for accommodating visitors and enhancing their overall experience at the sacred site.





Enhance Visitor Appeal:

Another key focus of the visit was to identify any additional facilities or amenities that may be required to enhance Chenla Nye's appeal as a premier destination for both domestic and international tourists. This involved assessing the existing infrastructure and considering potential enhancements—such as information centers, cultural exhibits, or recreational areas—that could improve visitor satisfaction. Enhancing the overall visitor experience is seen as a strategic approach to attracting more tourists and promoting Chenla Nye as a significant religious and eco-tourism site.

Promote Eco-Tourism and Support Local Communities:

The visit also focused on promoting Chenla Nye as a significant religious and eco-tourism site, which is considered vital for stimulating local economic growth, particularly for communities in the Trashigang region. Increased tourism is expected to create opportunities for local businesses, generate employment, and contribute to the broader economic development of Bhutan. Emphasizing eco-tourism ensures that the sector's growth aligns with Bhutan's commitment to sustainable practices, maintaining a balance between economic development and environmental conservation.





Evaluate Contractor Progress and Ensure Sustainable Infrastructure:

The visit also aimed to evaluate the progress of the contracted workers involved in the project and to address any challenges they may be encountering in completing the infrastructure development. Effective execution is essential to ensure that the facilities under construction are not only functional but also sustainable and appealing to future visitors. Upon completion, the project is expected to play a pivotal role in positioning Chenla Nye as a must-visit destination, thereby strengthening eco-tourism in eastern Bhutan. This initiative extends beyond infrastructure development; it represents a strategic investment in the region's cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and economic future. By attracting more visitors to Chenla Nye, the project is intended to deliver long-term benefits to local communities while supporting Bhutan's national objectives of promoting eco-friendly tourism and economic resilience.

Personal Observations

Chenla Ney holds profound spiritual significance as a sacred site closely linked to Buddhist teachings, believed to have been blessed by Guru Rinpoche. Its rich history and association with Drubthob Dongag Rinchen make it a compelling destination for both domestic and international visitors seeking spiritual connection and cultural experiences. The site's unique blend of natural beauty and religious importance positions it as a potential hotspot for eco-tourism, drawing those interested in exploring Bhutan's spiritual heritage.

However, during the site visit, it became evident that contract workers are facing significant challenges due to unpredictable weather conditions in the region. The absence of well-constructed roads—such as farm roads or stable horse tracks—has exacerbated these difficulties. Even where basic pathways exist, they are often in poor condition, rendered nearly impassable by heavy mud and slippery surfaces. These hazardous road conditions not only impede the progress of contract workers tasked with maintaining or paving the route to Chenla Ney but also pose considerable risks to tourists, travelers, and local residents who rely on these paths.

The persistent muddy and slippery terrain severely compromises accessibility, leading to delays and safety concerns for all parties involved. For contract workers, the lack of stable ground makes construction and maintenance efforts arduous, resulting in increased time and labor costs. Meanwhile, travelers—whether tourists seeking to explore the area or domestic visitors—are left vulnerable to accidents and discomfort, which could disrupt their journeys. Without immediate improvements to infrastructure, these challenges will continue to hinder mobility, economic activity, and overall safety for those navigating the route.

Addressing these issues will require collaborative efforts, including the construction of more robust road systems, the use of weather-resistant materials, and effective contingency planning to mitigate the impact of adverse weather. Such measures are essential to ensure smoother operations for workers and safer, more reliable access for all users of the pathway to Chenla Ney. By prioritizing these improvements, the project can enhance both the visitor experience and the working conditions for those involved in its development, ultimately maximizing the site's potential to attract visitors.

Findings on GEF Activities



Horse Pathway Construction

The construction of the horse pathway is currently in progress; however, it faces significant challenges primarily due to adverse weather conditions. The completed sections of the path are in poor condition, characterized by muddy and slippery surfaces that pose substantial safety risks for both construction workers and future users. These hazardous conditions not only hinder the efficiency of the ongoing work but also raise concerns about the potential for accidents among those who will traverse the pathway once it is completed. Continuous rainfall has exacerbated the situation, leading to increased erosion and making the terrain particularly difficult to navigate. This relentless weather has created a cycle of challenges, as the muddy conditions impede both the movement of construction equipment and the safety of laborers on site. As a result, it is crucial to implement immediate measures to stabilize the pathway and improve drainage systems to mitigate these issues. Addressing these challenges effectively will be vital to ensuring the pathway can be completed safely and will provide reliable access for future visitors.



Motorable Road Construction

The construction of a motorable road from Threlphu to Shinangjulu has been successfully completed. This development significantly improves access to the region, facilitating easier transportation for both visitors and local communities. The road enhances the logistical capacity for transporting materials and supplies necessary for ongoing infrastructure projects, thereby contributing to the overall goal of promoting eco-tourism at Chenla Ney. However, it is important to note that the road becomes muddy during the summer months, which poses challenges for travel and transportation.

To mitigate these issues, the implementation of proper geosynthetic paving (GSP) and an effective drainage system is essential to ensure the road remains accessible and safe for users throughout the year.



Construction of Guesthouse, Restroom and Kitchen

Regarding other project components, the construction of essential facilities such as the guest house, restroom, and kitchen is currently in progress. Preparations are underway, with materials being gradually transported to the site. While the construction has not yet fully commenced, it is anticipated that all components will be completed by the end of June. This infrastructure is designed to accommodate both domestic and international visitors, enhancing the overall experience at Chenla Ney. The ongoing work is being carefully managed to navigate the logistical challenges of moving building materials through the challenging terrain, while also adapting to the unpredictable weather conditions. This proactive approach ensures that the development of Chenla Ney as a premier eco-tourism destination remains on track and aligns with the project timeline.

Key Challenges Identified



- Persistent rain has created consistently muddy conditions, slowing progress on the horse path and making it unsafe for use.
- The delivery of construction materials is proving to be a major bottleneck, as the lack of proper roads requires reliance on manual or animal-based transport methods.
- The combined effect of weather and logistical issues has resulted in slower-than-anticipated progress, pushing back the start of structural construction.

Immediate Concerns

- The slippery and unstable condition of the horse path raises safety concerns for workers and could deter future visitors if not addressed.
- The delayed start of guest facilities construction may impact the overall project timeline, requiring adjustments to the original schedule.
- Continued poor weather could further hinder material delivery and site preparation work.



Recommendations for Future Improvement

Infrastructure Development and Maintenance

To ensure the long-term success of the Chenla Nye project, immediate attention should be given to improving critical infrastructure. The current horse pathway needs upgrading with proper drainage systems and all-weather surfacing to prevent erosion and mudslides during monsoon seasons. Additional amenities like directional signage, resting shelters at regular intervals, and emergency contact points along the route would significantly enhance visitor safety and comfort. The guest house, kitchen, and restroom facilities under construction should incorporate sustainable designs, such as solar-powered lighting and water-saving fixtures, to align with Bhutan's eco-tourism principles. Regular maintenance schedules must be established to preserve these investments.

Sustainable Tourism and Community Engagement

Promoting Chenla Nye as an eco-tourism destination requires a multi-pronged approach. A comprehensive marketing strategy should be developed in collaboration with the Tourism Council of Bhutan, highlighting the site's unique blend of spiritual significance and natural beauty. Local communities must be actively involved through training programs for homestay operations, cultural guiding, and handicraft sales to ensure tourism benefits are widely distributed. Establishing a community-based tourism committee would help maintain authentic experiences while addressing visitor management challenges.

Environmental Protection Measures

In the future, if visitor numbers increase, robust environmental safeguards must be implemented. A waste management system with segregated bins and regular collection schedules should be installed to maintain the pristine condition of the area. Visitor education programs about responsible tourism practices could include mandatory briefings on proper waste disposal and respect for sacred spaces. An environmental impact assessment should guide decisions on carrying capacity limits, particularly during sensitive ecological periods.

Funding and Long-Term Sustainability

Securing diverse funding sources will be crucial for the project's longevity. Beyond the initial GEF funding, partnerships with international conservation organizations and government tourism departments should be explored. Implementing a modest visitor conservation fee could generate ongoing revenue for maintenance and community projects. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should track both economic benefits and environmental impacts, with findings used to adapt management strategies.

Cultural Preservation and Enhancement

The spiritual significance of Chenla Nye presents opportunities for meaningful cultural tourism. Documenting the site's history and associated legends through professional recordings and interpretive displays would enrich the visitor experience. Seasonal cultural events could be organized in collaboration with local monasteries, offering tourists authentic encounters with Bhutanese traditions while generating additional income for communities.

Conclusion & Way Forward

The visit to Chenla Ney has provided valuable insights into the ongoing infrastructure development aimed at establishing this sacred site as a prominent destination for eco-tourism. With its profound spiritual significance, closely linked to Buddhist teachings and historical figures like Guru Rinpoche and Drubthob Dongag Rinchen, Chenla Ney holds the potential to attract both domestic and international visitors seeking meaningful cultural and spiritual experiences.

Significant progress has been made, particularly in the construction of the horse pathway, yet persistent adverse weather conditions have created muddy and unsafe terrain, hindering both construction efforts and the safety of potential visitors. The delayed initiation of essential guest facilities—such as the guesthouse, kitchen, and restroom—underscores the logistical challenges posed by the difficult environment.

To address these issues, immediate upgrades to the pathway are necessary, including the implementation of proper drainage and all-weather surfacing to enhance accessibility and safety. Additionally, actively engaging local communities in tourism initiatives will ensure that the economic benefits of increased visitor numbers are widely distributed, empowering residents through training programs in homestay operations and cultural guiding.

Robust environmental protection measures, such as waste management systems and visitor education programs, will be essential to safeguarding the natural beauty and spiritual significance of Chenla Ney. Exploring diverse funding sources beyond the initial GEF support, including partnerships with conservation organizations and the introduction of a visitor conservation fee, will help ensure the project's long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, documenting the rich history and legends associated with Chenla Ney can enhance the cultural tourism experience, while seasonal events organized in collaboration with local monasteries can provide tourists with authentic interactions with Bhutanese traditions.

Ultimately, by implementing these strategies, Chenla Ney can emerge as a vital religious and eco-tourism site, fostering local economic growth while preserving its cultural and spiritual heritage for future generations. The successful realization of this vision will not only enhance the visitor experience but also contribute to the broader objectives of promoting sustainable tourism and environmental conservation in Bhutan.



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