



Pungyen Gumba

Pungyen Gumba is an ancient, spiritually revered Buddhist monastery situated on a vast alpine plateau at an altitude of 4,000 meters (13,120 ft) in the Manaslu region. Hidden directly beneath the towering, icy south face of Mount Manaslu (8,163 m), this remote sanctuary is dedicated to Lord Pungyen the protective deity of the mountain. Surrounded by expansive glacial valleys, fluttering prayer flags, and grazing yaks, the gumba offers a peaceful retreat deeply rooted in Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

History

- **Origin (~1600 CE):** Constructed over 400 years ago by Nubri and Tsumba settlers, the monastery was established to appease and honor Lord Pungyen. In local Tibetan dialect, "Pung" means ornament/decoration and "Gyen" refers to three peaks, paying homage to the guardian deity presiding over Mount Manaslu, Himalchuli, and Ganesh Himal.
- **The 1953 Avalanche:** According to local tradition, early foreign climbing expeditions angered the mountain deity. In May 1953, a massive ice serac collapsed from Manaslu's glaciers, triggering an avalanche that destroyed the original stone monastery and killed 18 people.
- **Earthquakes & Rebuilding:** The complex was subsequently rebuilt across the plateau. After suffering further structural damage during the 1934 and 2015 earthquakes, the local Nubri community, along with monastic guardians, restored the sacred site using traditional stone masonry.

Features

- **History:** 400 years old.
- **Location:** Tsumnubri - 1, Gorkha (within the Manaslu Conservation Area).
- **Structure:** Traditional Alpine
- **Guardian Deity of Manaslu:** Pungyen Gumba acts as the spiritual gateway. Herders and villagers present butter offerings to secure safety for their pastures and communities

Architecture & Layout

- **Traditional Alpine Architecture:** Built from hand-chiseled mountain granite and local timber, the small, low-slung stone structure is specifically designed to resist intense high-altitude winds and severe snowfalls.
- **Mani Walls & Chortens:** The surrounding grounds feature white-plastered chortens (stupas), prayer wheels, and extensive mani walls lined with carved stone tablets inscribed with *Om Mani Padme Hum*.

- **Inner Shrine:** The main prayer chamber houses sacred statues of Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Rinpoche, and Lord Pungyen, alongside traditional thangka scroll paintings and butter lamp altars.



Religious & Cultural Significance

- **Guardian Deity of Manaslu:** Local inhabitants view Mount Manaslu as the sacred abode of Lord Pungyen. Pungyen Gumpa acts as the spiritual gateway and primary altar where herders and villagers present butter offerings to secure safety for their pastures and communities.

- **Nyingma & Sakya Tradition:** The monastery holds sacred status within the Nyingma and Sakya sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Monks and pilgrims travel to the plateau to conduct retreat practices, meditation, and scripture recitations.
- **Acclimatization Haven:** Sitting almost 500 meters higher than Samagaun (3,530 m), the trek up to Pungyen Gompa provides one of the best high-altitude acclimatization excursions prior to crossing the Larkya La Pass (5,106 m).



Major Festivals & Celebrations

- **Lhosar (Tibetan New Year):** Celebrated with special cleansing rituals, burning of juniper bushes, and communal prayers for prosperity in the coming year.
- **Full-Moon Pujas & Saga Dawa:** Observed with light offerings, circumambulation (*Kora*) around the chortens, and monastic chants accompanied by traditional horns and cymbals.
- **Seasonal Herder Blessings:** During early spring and autumn, local yak herders visit the gompa to receive blessings before moving livestock across the high alpine pastures.



Quick Tips for Visitors

- **No Commercial Facilities:** There are no teahouses, lodges, or shops at Pungyen Gompa. Visitors must pack sufficient drinking water, high-energy food/snacks, and windproof clothing.
- **Clockwise Respect:** Walk clockwise when passing mani walls, chortens, or the main gompa structure.
- **Monastic Decorum:** Remove hats and shoes before stepping into the shrine hall, keep noise levels low, and request permission before photographing resident lamas or sacred artifacts.