

TRAVEL GUIDELINES **BHUTAN**



BHUTAN

Nestled in the Himalayas, Bhutan had for centuries followed a policy of isolation. It is only in the latter half of this century that Bhutan has opened its doors to the world. Along with development, Bhutan had cautiously opened its doors to tourists. Tourism is still developing in Bhutan guarded by rules aimed at safeguarding Bhutan's environment and heritage. Tourism plays an important role in contributing to the conservation of our culture and environment. We have been trying to promote the awareness among our guests that for every dollar they pay the tour operator 35 cents goes towards the maintenance of the social infrastructure as well as the conservation of the environment which in turn improves the quality of their tour.

Bhutan is a tiny nation in the Himalayas and sandwiched between India and Tibet. It is divided into three regions – Western, Central and Eastern Bhutan. Each region in Bhutan is identified with their respective valleys and major towns; each valley is further divided by the high mountain passes. The routings in Bhutan are very simple and everything falls on either side of the only national highway connecting the country from West to East. Travel routings in Bhutan take this only highway to travel from one place to another and come back the same way.



Official Name – Bhutan | **Capital** – Thimphu | **Area** – 46,500 sq. km approximately

National Flower – Blue poppy | **Population** – 600,000+ approximately

Languages – Dzongkha, The national language of Bhutan is Dzongkha though many other dialects and languages are spoken. English is widely spoken too | **National Animal** – Takin

TRAVEL IN BHUTAN

Ku zu zang pola

Ta shi De lek

Ka din chey

Choe gi mi ga chi mo?

Ngi gi miing.

Ga tae mo?

Nga - na dep ing.

Ga chi mo?

Di lu ga de chi mo?

Gong boem

Gang chhungkhu

Ming go

Tuip bay

Lha zhim

Ga tok to

hello/greeting.

good luck, (also used as a greeting)

Thank you

What is your name?

My name is

Where is?

I'm staying at

What is it/this?

How much does this cost?

High price/expensive

low Price/cheap

Do not want

okay

Good/Nice

Happy/Enjoyable

Visa Procedures

All travelers (except Indian, Bangladeshi & Maldivian nationals) travelling to Bhutan will require a visa for their stay in the Kingdom and we are happy to assist with the visa application/s. Please note that each Passport must be valid for at least 6 months from the intended date of departure from the Kingdom. Bhutan visa processing requires at least 14 working days.

Climate

In Bhutan climate varies widely from region to region. The dry autumn and winter months (from September to mid-March) offer warm days with temperatures ranging from 12°-20°C (54-68°F). Cobalt blue skies can be enjoyed throughout the days in winter. Evenings and early mornings are cool with overnight temperatures often falling to freezing. The spring season (**Mid-March to June**) offers warmer temperatures of 16°- 30°C (61°-86°F). During the summer (**June to September**), days are clear and warm with temperatures of 22°-26°C (72°-79°F). Afternoon showers dispel some of the heat and temperatures fall to around 15°C (59°F) at night. It rains in most part of Bhutan from mid **June to end August, July** is peak monsoon.

Currency

The national currency in Bhutan is the ngultrum (Nu) and cash is the preferred medium of exchange. Prices are usually quoted in ngultrum although US dollars are widely accepted and changed. Guests are recommended to carry cash in either currency or traveller's cheques, as there is limited ATM



access. Existing ATMs are credit card only. However, most of the antique/textile shops around Thimphu and Paro accept VISA credit cards and a few accept American Express. Ngultrum can be reconverted if changed through an authorised money exchanger.

At all major (Luxury) hotels, VISA, Mastercard and American Express are accepted and currency exchange to Bhutanese ngultrum is available using the following currencies – US Dollar, Pound Sterling and Euro. But guests are advised to carry sufficient cash or traveller's cheques for purchases just in case and to be on a safer side while travelling.

Immigration requirements

Tourist visas are required and must be obtained prior to arriving in the country. The processing of visa applications will be arranged by Banyan Bhutan and requires approximately 14 days for handling. A visa fee of US\$40 will be charged at time of booking. The departure tax is included in the airfare. Indian nationals do not require a visa to visit Bhutan.

Health

The best medical facilities are at the general hospital in Thimphu. Travellers are advised to avoid untreated/un-boiled water. Altitude sickness can affect some travellers although accommodation is at a similar altitude to most ski resorts. General medicines are readily available but guests are advised to bring any prescription medicines. Please kindly check with your doctor for altitude sickness and bring the appropriate medicine to acclimatize. Guests should consult their doctors and arrange travel insurance prior to departure.

Travel Tips/Clothing

Electricity is 230 volts. Bhutan is plus six hours GMT, 30 minutes ahead of India, one hour behind Thailand and two hours behind Singapore. In spring and summer, light clothing is appropriate with a sweater or jacket in the evenings. From autumn through winter, down jackets, fleeces, hats and gloves are necessary. Sports shoes are suitable for light touring, while hiking boots are recommended for treks. Legs, shoulders and upper arms need to be covered when visiting *dzongs*, monasteries and *lhakhangs*. Sunscreen, lip balm, and sunglasses are recommended for higher elevations. Layered clothing, a warm windproof/waterproof jacket for the early morning thongdrel viewing is advised. Some form of waterproofing in case of early spring showers. Laundry services are available but best to bring enough change of garments. Good comfortable shoes for walking around.

GENERAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Traveling by road - over mountainous terrain and winding roads (with short stops)

Due to the basic nature of Bhutan's roads and the ongoing up-gradation of the same, the national highway on which guests will travel will have intermittent closures for road works at various points between the valleys leading to extended waiting time at the road closures. During inter-lodge transfers and while on excursions, guests will encounter degraded roads, at times quite severe, that require slow vehicle speeds to reduce the bumpiness and bouncing of the vehicle and passengers, which may create some inconveniences and delays in anticipated travel times.



The below travel times are based on ideal road conditions, however, as indicated above, with the ongoing road widening works and road conditions, travel times between hotels will be protracted and exact transfer times remain uncertain.

	Paro	Thimphu	Punakha	Gangtey	Bumthang
Paro		1.5 hours	4 hours	6 hours	10 hours
Thimphu	1.5 hours		2.5 hours	5 hours	8 hours
Punakha	4 hours	2.5 hours		2.5 hours	6.5 hours
Gangtey	6 hours	5 hours	2.5 hours		5 hours
Bumthang	10 hours	8 hours	6.5 hours	5 hours	

The above indicated driving times are straight transfer times and do not include breaks in the journey for sightseeing, excursions, hikes, picnic or rest stops. At times there may be delays in the transfer time due to road conditions, upgrading/widening of the national highway and/or inclement weather.

Druk Air

Druk Air, Bhutan’s national carrier is the only airline that operates in and out of Bhutan. Its major destination hub is **Bangkok** with the most frequent connections (flying time is just over 3 hours), however flights from and to **Singapore, Delhi, Kolkatta** and **Kathmandu** are also available on a less frequent basis. Druk Air schedules are published only 2-3 months prior to the relevant period.

NB. In order to book flights, we will require Passport copies of those travelling to ensure name accuracy.

Druk Air schedules and airfares are subject to change without prior notice.

Druk Air Domestic

Druk Air also offers a domestic service, operating flights between Paro and the eastern airports of Bumthang and Yonphula. The service schedules move with the seasons, however usually there is a service on a Thursday and Saturday with additional services added when demand dictates. The plane used is an ATR aircraft with approx. 44 seats.

Additionally, there is the option to charter the aircraft on these routes, allowing the plane for yourself and your guests - maximum of 20 passengers.

NB. When this flight option is accepted, your original guide will be left at the port of embarkation and on arrival at your destination, a new guide will take over your touring needs.

We cannot take responsibility for the operation of this outsourced service. Druk Air schedules and airfares are subject to change without prior notice.

BHUTAN READING LIST

Distinct Destinations Recommends...

KINGDOMS BEYOND THE CLOUDS:

JOURNEYS IN SEARCH OF THE HIMALAYAN KINGS – *Jonathan Gregson*

THE HISTORY OF BHUTAN – *Dr Karma Phuntsho*

IN THE KINGDOM OF THE THUNDER DRAGON – *Joanna Lumley*

BEYOND THE SKY AND THE EARTH: A JOURNEY INTO BHUTAN – *Jamie Zeppa*

HIDDEN BHUTAN: ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF THE THUNDER DRAGON – *Martin Uitz*

DREAMS OF THE PEACEFUL DRAGON: JOURNEY INTO BHUTAN – *Katie Hickman*

BUTTER TEA AT SUNRISE: A YEAR IN THE BHUTAN HIMALAYAS – *Britta Das*

KINGDOM OF THE GOLDEN DRAGON – *Isabel Allende*

THE BLESSINGS OF BHUTAN – *Russ and Blyth Carpenter*

BOLD BHUTAN BECKONS – *Tim Fischer and Tshering Tashi*

TREASURES OF THE THUNDER DRAGON: A PORTRAIT OF BHUTAN – *Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, the first wife of the fourth King.*

LONELY PLANET GUIDE TO BHUTAN – *5th edition March 2014*

THE FOOTPRINT GUIDE TO BHUTAN – *2nd edition September 2010*

BHUTAN: HIMALAYAN MOUNTAIN KINDOM – *Francoise Pommaret – 2005*

BHUTAN – *A Trekker's Guide by Bart Jordans (2008) which has maps and in depth summaries of 27 treks across the country.*