



GENERAL INFORMATION

Bhutan & Tourism

Located in the eastern Himalayas and bordered by China in the north and India in the east, west and south, Bhutan is a mountainous, land-locked country. The population of around 634,982 is still mostly engaged in subsistence farming. Bhutan opened up to the outside world only in 1974 and, keen to safeguard an ancient and rich cultural heritage, we adopted a cautious tourism policy right from the start, to avoid the negative impact that uncontrolled mass tourism could have in such a small and sparsely populated country.

People

Bhutan's population of slightly more than 634,982 is, in many ways, one large family. The Bhutanese are, by nature physically strong and fiercely independent with an open and ready sense of humour. Hospitality is an in-built social value in Bhutan. More than 85% of the Bhutanese people live in rural areas and largely depend on various forms of subsistence farming. Animal products such as milk, butter, meat, wool etc. supplement livelihood and earnings from agriculture.

Irrespective of the country's small size there is the variety of populations that make up the country. From the yak herders of the north to the orange growers of the south, Bhutan can boast of a fascinating kaleidoscope of populations. Nevertheless, the national language is 'Dzongkha' and the national costume 'Gho' and 'Kira' for men and women respectively.

Environment

Bhutan has been described as a natural paradise. This is because Bhutan has a pristine environment with a very high level of biodiversity. It has been declared as one of 10 global 'hotspots' for the conservation of biodiversity, with the highest species density in the world, the highest fraction of land under protected areas (26%) and the highest proportion of forest cover of any Asian country (72.5%). Over 165 species of animals (mammals), and more than 770 species of birds have been identified. In addition, the rich flora includes more than 50 species of rhododendron and more than 300 species of medicinal plants, mostly alpine, that are used in traditional herbal medic.

Architecture

Bhutan has a rich architecture that has not yet been deprived of its unique culture and thereby represents a significant feature of the Bhutanese identity. It is without doubt one of the best expressions of the Kingdom's unique character. We have the majestic and strategically positioned fortress-monasteries (dzongs), dramatically located temples (lhakang) and monasteries (gompa), Village farm house (Gung Chim), and various types of religious and unique structures such as Buddhist stupas (chorten), prayer walls, and bridges. Traditional shapes, colours and patterns on the walls, doors, windows, place Bhutanese architecture in a class of its own. The oldest buildings, such as Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang valley or Kyichu in Paro valley, date from the period of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. Later many monasteries were built in Bhutan between the 13th and 17th centuries. This architectural heritage is still visible today.

A rich culture

Tucked away in a small section of the vast mountain chain is Bhutan with its unique rich cultural heritage. Because of its long isolation, Bhutan has been able to preserve its diverse customs and values comprising of language and literature, the arts and crafts, ceremonies and events etc. There evolved a series of traditional skills or crafts, which came to be known as zorig Chusum (Thirteen traditional crafts). The legendary thanka is an example of one such craft - fine art. The exquisite traditional painting is also visible on monasteries and houses, skillfully enhancing the architecture.

Music, dance, and handicrafts, both by the clergy and the lay population, play an important role in the day to day function of the society. Bhutan's textile tradition has become popular and is being increasingly appreciated by textile specialists, collectors and users of other countries.

Time:

Bhutan time is 6 hours (5 hours in summer) ahead of GMT and there is only one time zone throughout the country.

Food:

Bhutanese Traditional delicacies are hot and spicy - Chilies are taken as vegetables in Bhutan. However, as our guests you can enjoy delicious Chinese, Continental, Bhutanese and Indian Cuisine – even when on a trek! In the hotels meals are normally served in buffet style, and spices are adapted to more western tastes.

Accommodation:

Boonserm Tours will ensure that our guest are provided with the best available accommodation within Bhutan. In the major cities like Thimphu, Paro and Phuentsholing there are comfortable hotels, lodges and guesthouses close to all tourist destinations. In the smaller towns, hotel establishments are more modest and simple, but comfortable, clean and offering good basic facilities.

Shopping

Handicrafts are the main items purchased by the travelers in Bhutan. The beautiful handwoven fabrics, wooden boxes which are used as plates, the country's exquisite postage stamps, carved masks, woven baskets, handmade paper, finely crafted metal objects and thangkas are the items they purchase.

Choki Handicrafts shop, located next to the Folk Heritage museum in Thimphu is closely linked to Choki Traditional Art School, a charitable institute – many of the goods at the shop are produced in the school itself and all proceeds go towards the upkeep of the school and the provision of free tuition, food and lodging for the students. The school gives opportunity to the economically disadvantaged students from different parts of Bhutan and train them in learning the traditional arts and crafts of the country. When you buy a product from Choki Handicrafts, you are helping towards the brighter side of this students. For more information about the school, visit www.chokischool.com

Customs

All visitors are required to complete the Customs Form and hand it over to the Customs authorities on

arrival. A tourist shall be allowed to import free from Customs duty, used articles of personal wear and regular use including cigarettes, tobacco, alcoholic drinks or a combination of these items subject to the following ceilings.

- A) Personal effects and articles for day to day use by the visitor.
- B) Alcohol, Cigarettes and Pipe tobacco as follows;
 - Cigarettes: 2 cartons subject to 100 percent Customs Duty and 100 percent Sales Tax.
 - Cigars: 2 boxes or 50 pieces subject to 100 percent Customs Duty and 100 percent Sales Tax.
 - Spirits: 2 bottles, each bottle not larger than one litre.
- C) Instruments, apparatus or appliances for professional use.
- D) Photographic equipment, video cameras and other electronic goods for personal use.

Those articles described in section C and D must be declared on the Custom Form. If such items are disposed of in Bhutan by sale or gift they become liable for customs duty. Import and Export of the following goods are strictly prohibited :

- A) Arms, ammunition, explosives and military stores.
- B) All narcotics and drugs, medically prescribed drugs are exempt.
- c) Wildlife products, especially those of endangered species.
- D) Antiques.

NOTE : Visitors are advised to be cautious in purchasing old and used items. Customs authorities will not allow any old/used items to be taken out of the country if they have not been certified as non-antique. Import of plants, soils etc. are subject to quarantine regulations. These items must be declared on arrival.

Currency

The Bhutanese currency is called the Ngultrum and is at par with the Indian Rupee and both are used in Bhutan. 1Nu (Ngultrum) = 100ch (Cheltrums) US\$ 1=45 Nu. Foreign currencies can be changed at the airport and from the banks. Some credit cards like the Visa, the American Express and the JCB are accepted by the bigger hotels and business establishments mostly confined to bigger towns like Thimphu, Paro and Phuentsholing. Therefore it is advisable to bring sufficient amount in cash rather than fully depending on the credit card.

Telecommunications

Bhutan is well connected and virtually every town has IDD services. Internet cafes are also available almost every where. B-Mobile(Cellular service provider) has now tied up with 124 live operators in 40 different countries making it possible for the guest to use their own cell phone in Bhutan and stay connected. You can now use the international roaming facility. Simply follow the steps below when you arrive Bhutan.

Step 1 : Switch off and switch on the phone

Step 2 : In the network selection, choose BTN 11 or 402 11

Step 3 : Lock to the above network and enjoy roaming facility anywhere in Bhutan

Climate

The climate varies widely depending on the elevation. In the south, it is sub-tropical; at the northern extreme known as the Greater Himalayas, there is perpetual snow. The mid valleys which runs from east to west with elevations ranging from 1200 m to as high as 2800 m enjoy warm summer and cool dry winter.

Very little rain falls in October through May making it ideal for trekking. The table below shows the average temperature variations throughout the year.

PLACES	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
PARO	9.4	13.8	14.5	17.6	23.5	25.4	26.8	25.3	23.4	18.7	13.9	11.2
	-5.8	1.5	0.6	4.6	10.6	14.1	14.9	14.7	11.7	7.6	1.4	-1.7
THIMPHU	12.3	14.4	16.4	20.0	22.5	24.4	24.9	23.9	23.1	21.9	17.9	14.5
	2.6	0.6	3.9	7.1	13.1	15.2	13.4	15.8	15.0	10.4	5.0	-1.1
PUNAKHA	16.1	19.6	21.12	24.4	27.2	31.2	32.0	31.4	19.8	27.8	22.3	15.0
	4.2	5.3	9.2	11.2	14.8	19.5	21.6	11	11.5	18.9	13.0	7.9
WANGDI	17.0	19.0	22.8	26.2	29.1	29.2	28.4	29.1	27.5	26.2	22.6	19.1
	4.3	7.8	10.4	12.8	18	20.1	16.2	20.0	19.1	14.7	9.6	6.3
TRONGSA	13.0	13.9	16.7	20.1	21.0	22.2	25.3	23.8	22.6	21.8	19.8	18.2
	-0.2	0.4	4.4	6.6	11.6	13.6	15.3	15.0	14.2	11.7	6.4	2.5
BUMTHANG	10.8	10.0	16.2	18.7	21.3	22.5	14.1	23.0	21.6	19.5	16.1	12.3
	-5.1	-1.4	3.5	3.9	9.5	3.5	10.9	13.7	12.1	5.9	-0.5	-2.3
MONGAR	15.5	15.9	20.0	22.8	25.1	26.1	16.1	25.4	24.7	22.7	19.9	15.7
	8.2	8.3	11.6	14.0	17.4	19.5	15.8	19.6	19.4	15.8	11.2	9.5
TASHIGANG	20.4	21.7	24.8	28.3	30.0	30.7	31.5	30.2	30.0	29.1	26.1	23.0
	10.5	11.5	14.4	17.0	20.6	22.6	23.1	22.7	23.9	17.7	13.6	11.6

The Best Time to Travel

Bhutan has a season for everyone. The kingdom stretches across all climatic zones; from the sub-tropical jungles in the south, to the moderate heights of 2000-3000 meters in the centre and up to the alpine world of the towering Himalayas and glaciers of the east.

In Winter dry and pleasant conditions make this the best time of the year for bird watching, visiting villages, village to village trekking in the lower altitudes or bicycle trip along quiet mountain roads. The trekking routes in the high mountains are covered in deep snow and are impassable at this time of the year. The impressive and endangered Black Necked Cranes spend the winter in the high valley of Bumdeling (in eastern Bhutan) and Phobjikha (in central Bhutan).

In Spring the trekking season commences in moderate altitudes. Above 3000 meters spectacular rhododendron forest bloom. In Paro, one of the largest monastic festivals, Paro Tshechu, takes place. The temperature is pleasantly mild even up to the Alpine regions.

The Summer brings with it the monsoon, but this should not deter travellers. In the settled areas of Central and western Bhutan pleasant summer temperatures without heat or humidity can be found. Rain falls for short periods daily but is manageable with adequate planning and equipment. Treks in high mountain areas, e.g the snowman trek, are characterised by mild temperatures, verdant green meadows, and pastures of Blue poppies and Edelweiss. Nomads tending their yaks in the high mountains are a common sight.

Autumn is the traditional high season in Bhutan. September and October have the highest number of Tshechus (Monastic festivals). Trekkers particularly enjoy the clear weather with views of the Himalayan Mountains in October and the low rainfall. Rice harvest means a picturesque landscape, remarkable terraces and changing colour.

What to bring

It is advisable to bring appropriate clothing according to the climate (time of year) in which you choose to visit Bhutan. Casual clothes are fine, but if you have scheduled your trip around a festival, you definitely should be prepared to dress up a little.

For general sightseeing in Dzongs, monasteries, religious institutions and similar we suggest women to wear skirts or loose trousers, while men can wear jeans or loose trousers. In addition we would like to encourage all visitors to wear proper shirts, t-shirts or similar, avoiding tank-tops or similar modern tops. Bhutan is a very religiously oriented country and it is regarded as unseemly and sacrilegious to wear shorts, mini-skirts, revealing tops & hats while visiting public areas.

Your Bhutan Experience

With us you can explore and experience the essence of the Kingdom of Bhutan. As we specialize in small-group visits, our focus is on giving our guests an in-depth experience of our beautiful country. With our team of well-experienced guides and support staff, you will not only visit dzongs (fortresses) and lhakhangs (temples), and participate in traditional religious festivals (tsechus), but you will also get to meet and interact with local Bhutanese in the towns, villages and countryside and thus gain first-hand knowledge and understanding of their lives.

Visas & entry

Tourist visas cannot be obtained outside Bhutan. After a confirmed booking has been made through a Bhutanese tour operator and payment has been received, tourist visa approval will be issued by the Home Ministry.

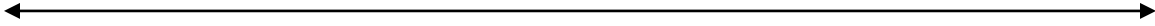
While it is possible to enter Bhutan via a land route, the most easiest and convenient way for visitors to get into Bhutan is by Druk Air, the only national air carrier operating in Bhutan. The modern airbus A-319 jets carry passengers through one of the most spectacular flight paths in the world. A particular highlight is the stretch between Kathmandu and Bhutan, where one passes 4 of the 5 highest mountains in the world. Weather permitting; passengers will be treated to magnificent views of Everest Lhotse, Makalu and Kangchenjunga. Landing in Paro Valley, surrounded by 4000 meter high mountains stretching across the West of Bhutan, means a visual landing is the order of the day. Visa clearance is necessary prior to boarding the flight to Paro. Visas are stamped in your passports on arrival at Paro. You can fly to Paro, Bhutan from any of the following cities;

Kathmandu, Nepal
Delhi, India
Calcutta, India
Bagdora, India
Bangkok, Thailand
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Why travel with us?

We have many years of experience in the tourism sector, and thus are confident of providing you with a trouble-free, enjoyable and culturally exciting travel experience in Bhutan. We specialize in small-group tourism, offering both general and customized packages to meet the requirements of our guests.

Our company supports the only charitable Art School in the Kingdom to provide education to poor and disadvantaged youth. Students of Choki Traditional Art School graduate with traditional arts and crafts skills which they can put to use to earn good livings back in their home villages. We can arrange for you to interact with the students and have a meal at the school, which is in a pretty village only a few miles up the valley from Thimphu. Your visit through us at no extra cost will encourage the students and help us to help other needy children. You can become a part of this social service. For more information about the school visit www.chokischool.com



I can highly recommend Boonserm Tours & Travels. The organisation was efficient and yet relaxed and flexible. Bhutan is the most wonderful country and seeing it with Boonserm Tours is the best way to do it.

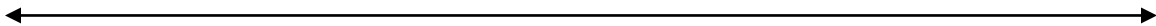
- Marita Crawley, UK

The tour was very well planned out and the agenda each day well thought out. We are grateful to Boonserm Tours & Travels for giving us this once in a life time experience and opportunity to see the real Bhutan and its gracious people.

- Carsten Henningsen, USA

My tour in Bhutan with Boonserm Tours and Travels was absolutely fantastic. I will be leaving Bhutan with some amazing memories which will stay with me forever...one day I will return to Bhutan as it is a beautiful place and different to anywhere else.

- Cheryl Leonard, UK



Boonserm Tours & Travels is a registered tour company with the Tourism Council of Bhutan and a member of the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO)

BOONSERM TOURS & TRAVELS

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