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DESTINATION

BHUTAN

TRAVELER'S GUIDE



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Thank you.*

POPULATION

Bhutan has a population of approximately 700,000 (2011), most of which live in villages. Previous estimates of Bhutan's population put it at more than three times as many.

TIME

Bhutan is five hours, 45 minutes ahead of GMT. 30 Minutes ahead of Indian Time.

VISAS

Visas are required for Bhutan and not issued by Embassies abroad. Visa is issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thimphu. Visas must be obtained before departing for Bhutan. Actual visa is stamped on arrival in Bhutan, visa is cleared in advance and a visa clearance number issued. Extension of visa, for up to 6 months can be obtained in Thimphu processed by your local operator.

HISTORY

Bhutan has its own distinct history, although it shares Nepal's Himalayan geography and neighbors.

The precursor of Bhutan, the state of Lhomon or Monyul, was said to have existed between 500 B.C. and 600 A.D. At the end of that period, Buddhism was introduced into the country; a branch of Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion of Bhutan. Religious rivalry among various Buddhist subjects also influenced political development; the rivalry began in the tenth century and continued through the seventeenth century, when a theocratic government independent of Tibetan political influence united the country. From that time until 1907, the Kingdom of Bhutan, or Drukyul (literally land of the Thunder Dragon), had a dual system of shared civil and spiritual Buddhist rule. In 1907 the absolute monarchy was established, and the hereditary position of Druk Gyalpo, or dragon King, was awarded to the powerful Wangchuck family.

The Druk Gyalpo controls the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government. The monarchy is absolute, but the king is admired and respected and is referred to by the people as "our King." The Council of Ministers and Royal Advisory Council are part of the executive branch of government. The legislative branch is made up of the unicameral National Assembly, or Tshogdu, whose members are either indirectly elected or appointed by the Druk Gyalpo. The 1953 royal decree on the Constitution of the National Assembly is the primary legal, or constitutional, basis for that body and sets forth its rules and procedures. The Supreme Court of Appeal, in effect the Druk Gyalpo, is the highest level court; judges are appointed by the Druk Gyalpo on recommendation by the Chief Justices. The civil and criminal code are based on seventeenth-century concepts which have been amended. But still this remains the basis and pillars of the Judicial system.

The 4th Druk Gyalpo at present is on the verge of retirement and in the process of discussing the Constitution with the people. In 2008 Bhutan will have a new King and also the first general election to elect its new democratically elected Government.

Origins and Early Settlement, A.D. 600-1600

Although knowledge of prehistoric Bhutan has yet to emerge through archaeological study, stone tools and weapons, remnants of large stone structures, and megaliths that may have been used for boundary markers or rituals provide evidence of civilization as early as 2000 B.C. The absence of Neolithic mythological legends argues against earlier inhabitation. A more certain prehistoric period has been theorized by historians as that of the state of Lhomon (literally, southern darkness) or Monyul (dark land, a reference to the Monpa aboriginal peoples of Bhutan), possibly a part of Tibet that was beyond the pale of Buddhist teachings. Variations of the Sanskrit words Bhota-ant (end of Bhot, an Indian name for Tibet) or Bhu-uttan (meaning highlands) have been



suggested by historians as origins of the name Bhutan, which came into common foreign use in the late nineteenth century and is used in Bhutan only in English-language official correspondence. The traditional name of the country since the seventeenth century has been Drukyl - country of the Drokpa, the Dragon People, or the Land of the Thunder Dragon - a reference to the country's dominant Buddhist sect.

Some scholars believe that during the early historical period the inhabitants were fierce mountain aborigines, the Monpa, who were of neither the Tibetan or Mongol stock that later overran northern Bhutan. The people of Monyul practiced the shamanistic Bon Religion, which emphasized worship of nature and the existence of good and evil spirits.

Arrival of Buddhism

The introduction of Buddhism occurred in the seventh century A.D. when Tibetan king Srongsten Gampo (reigned A.D 627-49) a convert to Buddhism, ordered the construction of two Buddhist temples, at Tumthang in central Bhutan and at Kyichu in the Paro Valley. Buddhism replaced but did not eliminate the Bon religious practices that had also been prevalent in Tibet until the late sixth century. Instead, Buddhism absorbed Bon and its believers. As the country developed in its many fertile valleys, Buddhism matured and became a unifying element. It was Buddhist literature and chronicles that began the recorded history of Bhutan.



In A.D. 747, a Buddhist saint, Padmasambhava (known in Bhutan as Guru Rimpoche and sometimes referred to as the Second Buddha), came to Bhutan from India at the invitation of one of the numerous local kings. After reportedly subduing eight classes of demons and converting the king, Guru Rimpoche moved on to Tibet. Upon his return from Tibet, he oversaw the construction of new monasteries in the Paro Valley and set up his headquarters in Bumthang. According to tradition, he founded the Nyinmapa sect -- also known as the 'old sect' or Red Hat sect -- of Mahayana Buddhism, which became for a time the dominant religion of Bhutan.

Rivalry among the Sects


By the tenth century, Bhutan's political development was heavily influenced by its religious history. Following a period in which Buddhism was in decline in Tibet in the eleventh century, contention among a number of subsects emerged. The Mongol overlords of Tibet and Bhutan patronized a sequence of subsects until their own political decline in the fourteenth century.

Theocratic Government: 1616-1907

In the seventeenth century, a theocratic government independent of Tibetan political influence was established, and premodern Bhutan emerged. The theocratic government was founded by an expatriate Drukpa monk, Ngawang Namgyal, who arrived in Bhutan in 1616 seeking freedom from the domination of the Gelugpa subsect led by the Dalai Lama (Ocean Lama) in Lhasa. After a series of victories over rival subsect leaders and Tibetan invaders, Ngawang Namgyal took the title Shabdrung (At Whose Feet One Submits, or, in many Western sources, dharma raja), becoming the temporal and spiritual leader of Bhutan.

Administrative Integration and Conflict with Tibet, 1651-1728

To keep Bhutan from disintegrating, Ngawang Namgyal's death in 1651 apparently was kept a carefully guarded secret for fifty-four years. Initially, Ngawang Namgyal was said to have entered into a religious retreat, a situation not unprecedented in Bhutan, Sikkim, or Tibet during that time. During the period of Ngawang Namgyal's supposed retreat, appointments of officials were issued in his name, and food was left in front of his locked door.



Ngawang Namgyal's son and stepbrother, in 1651 and 1680, respectively, succeeded him. They started their reigns as minors under the control of religious and civil regents and rarely exercised authority in their own names. For further continuity, the concept of multiple reincarnation of the first shabdrung -- in the form of either his body, his speech, or his mind -- was invoked by the Je Khenpo and the druk desi, both of whom wanted to retain the power they had accrued through the dual system of government.

Civil Conduct, 1728-72

Civil war ensued eighteenth century, Bhutan had successfully developed control over the principality of Cooch Behar. The raja of Cooch Behar had sought assistance from Bhutan against the Indian Mughals in 1730, and Bhutanese political influence was not long in following. By the mid-1760s, Thimphu considered Cooch Behar its dependency, stationing a garrison force there and directing its civil administration. When the druk desi invaded Sikkim in 1770, Cooch Behar forces joined their Bhutanese counterparts in the offensive. In a succession dispute in Cooch Behar two years later, however, the druk desi's nominee for the throne was opposed by a rival who invited British troops, and, in effect, Cooch Behar became a dependency of the British East India Company.

British Intrusion, 1772-1907

Under the Cooch Behari agreement with the British, a British expeditionary force drove the Bhutanese garrison out of Cooch Behar and invaded Bhutan in 1772-73. The druk desi petitioned Lhasa for assistance from the Panchen Lama, who was serving as regent for the youthful Dalai Lama. In correspondence with the British governor general of India, however, the Panchen Lama instead castigated the druk desi and invoked Tibet's claim of suzerainty over Bhutan.

Failing to receive help from Tibet, the druk desi signed a Treaty of Peace with the British East India Company on April 25, 1774. Bhutan agreed to return to its pre-1730 boundaries, paid a symbolic tribute of five horses to Britain, and, among other concessions, allowed the British to harvest timber in Bhutan. Subsequent missions to Bhutan were made by the British in 1776, 1777, and 1783, and commerce was opened between British India and Bhutan and, for a short time, Tibet. In 1784 the British turned over to Bhutanese control Bengal Duars territory, where boundaries were poorly defined. As in its other foreign territories, Bhutan left administration of the Bengal Duars territory to local officials and collected its revenues.

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Boundary disputes plagued Bhutanese-British relations. To reconcile their difference, Bhutan sent an emissary to Calcutta in 1787, and the British sent missions to Thimphu in 1815 and 1838. The 1815 mission was inconclusive. The 1838 mission offered a treaty providing for extradition of Bhutanese officials responsible for incursions into Assam, free and unrestricted commerce between India and Bhutan, and settlement of Bhutan's debt to the British. In an attempt to protect its independence, Bhutan rejected the British offer.

The British proceeded in 1841 to annex the formerly Bhutanese controlled Assam Duars, paying a compensation of 10,000 rupees a year to Bhutan. In 1842 Bhutan gave up control to the British of some of the troublesome Bengal Duars territory it had administered since 1784.

Establishment of the Hereditary Monarchy, 1907
Ugyen Wangchuck's emergence as the national leader coincided with the realization that the dual political system was obsolete and ineffective. He had removed his chief rival, the ponlop of Paro, and installed a supporter and relative, a member of the pro-British Dorji family, in his place. When the last shabdrung died in 1903 and a reincarnation had not appeared by 1906, civil administration came under the control of Ugyen Wangchuck. Finally, in 1907, the fifty-fourth and last druk desi was forced to retire, and despite recognition of subsequent reincarnations of Ngawang Namgyal, the shabdrung system came to an end.

In November 1907, an assembly of leading Buddhist monks, government officials, and heads of important families was held to end the moribund 300-year-old dual system of government and to establish a new absolute monarchy. Ugyen Wangchuck was elected its first hereditary Druk Gyalpo (Dragon King, reigned 1907-26). The Dorji family became hereditary holders of the position of gongzim (chief chamberlain), the top government post.

Development of Centralized Government, 1926-52
Ugyen Wangchuck died in 1926 and was succeeded by his son, Jigme Wangchuck (reigned 1926-52). The second Druk Gyalpo continued his father's centralization and modernization efforts and built more schools, dispensaries, and roads. During Jigme Wangchuck's reign, monasteries and district



governments were increasingly brought under royal control. However, Bhutan generally remained isolated from international affairs.

When British rule over India ended in 1947, so too did Britain's association with Bhutan.

Modernization under Jigme Dorji, 1952-72

The third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, was enthroned in 1952. He continued to modernize his nation throughout his 20 year reign. Among his first reforms was the establishment of the National Assembly - the Tshogdu-- in 1953. Although the Druk Gyalpo could issue royal decrees and exercise veto power over resolutions passed by the National Assembly, its establishment was a major move toward a constitutional monarchy.

When the Chinese communists took over Tibet in 1951, Bhutan closed its frontier with Tibet and sided with its powerful neighbor to the south. To offset the chance of Chinese encroachment, Bhutan began a modernization program. Land reform was accompanied by the abolition of slavery and serfdom and the separation of the judiciary from the executive branch of government.

Modernization efforts moved forward in the 1960s under the direction of the lonchen, Jigme Palden Dorji, the Druk Gyalpo's brother-in-law. In 1962, however, Dorji incurred disfavor with the Royal Bhutan Army over the use of military vehicle and the forced retirement of some fifty officers.

In 1966, to increase the efficiency of government administration, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck made Thimphu the year-round capital.

Entering the Outside World, 1972-86

When civil war broke out in Pakistan in 1971, Bhutan was among the first nations to recognize the new government of Bangladesh, and formal diplomatic relations were established in 1973. An event in 1975 may have served as a major impetus to Bhutan to speed up reform and modernization. In that year, neighboring Sikkim's monarchy, which had endured for more than 300 years, was ousted following a plebiscite in which the Nepalese majority outvoted the Sikkimese minority. Sikkim, long a protectorate of India, became India's twenty-second state. To further ensure its independence and international position, Bhutan gradually established diplomatic relations with other nations and joined greater numbers of regional and international organizations.

BHUTAN TODAY

Bhutan's De Facto constitutional monarchy has Druk Gyalpo (Dragon King) as the head of state and government. The Royal Family members serve as close advisers and heads of some ministries. Executive comprises Royal Advisory Council and Council of Ministers. Two thirds of its 150 members - representatives of the general public - indirectly elected every three years and the balance are monastic representatives appointed by the Buddhist hierarchy and government offices appointed by Druk Gyalpo.

Bhutan's national symbol is a traditional sacred wheel of Buddhism used to symbolize the king surrounded by his ministers. The two dragons surrounding the wheel stand for religious and secular administrations. The jeweled umbrella, a Buddhist symbol of luck, suggests spiritual protection for the people of Bhutan; the lotus blossom at the bottom represents peace and gentleness.

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RELIGION

Predominantly Buddhist, the Bhutanese practice the Drukpa Kargupa sect of Mahayan Buddhism. Religion has shaped the history of the nation and continues to play an important role in the life of god fearing and spiritual people. All over Bhutan, evidence of this can be seen in many religious monuments and symbols that have been erected. The air of spirituality is pervasive even in the urban centers where the spinning of prayer wheels, the murmur of mantras and the glow of butter lamps in the houses are still important features of every day life. Bhutan's religious sites and institutions are not museum, but the daily home of its people.

Before the introduction of Buddhism, animistic worship, generally characterized as Bon in the Himalayas, was prevalent in Bhutan. The sun, moon, sky and other natural elements were worshipped and doctrine was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Bon, from a Tibetan word meaning invocation or recitation, has priests -- bonpo -- who perform exorcism, burial rites, and divinations to tame threatening demons and to understand the wishes of the gods. Imported from Tibet and India, perhaps in the eight century, Bon doctrine became so strongly reinvigorated by Buddhism that by the eleventh century it reasserted itself as an independent school apart from Buddhism. Conversely, Bon influenced popular Buddhism, infusing it with and appreciation for omens and demons felt to influence daily life profoundly. Bon established a canon of teachings and continued to be practiced in modern Bhutan. 75% of the population practices Lamaistic Buddhism. Indian and Nepalese influenced Hinduism accounts for the remaining 25%.

LANGUAGE

Bhutan is linguistically rich with over eighteen dialects being spoken in the country. The richness of the linguistic diversity can be attributed to the geographical disposition of the country with its high mountain passes and deep valleys that contributed to their survival.

The national language is Dzongkha, which is the native language of the Ngalops of western Bhutan. Dzogkha literally means the language spoken in the Dzongs and administrative centers of Bhutan.

The other major languages are the Tshanglakha and the Lhotshamkha. Tshanglakha is the native language of the Tshanglas of eastern Bhutan while Lhotshamkha is spoken by the southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin.

Other dialects spoken are the Khengkha spoken by the Khengpas of Central Bhutan, the Bumthapkha spoken by the Bumthaps, the Mangdepkah spoken by the inhabitants of Trongs and the Cho Cha Nga Chang kha spoken by the Kurtoeps. The Sherpas, Lepchas and the Tamangs in southern Bhutan also have their own dialect. Dialects that is on the verge of becoming extinct is the Monkha and the Gongduepkha.



COMMON WORDS/PHRASES

Butter Tea
Chili
Good Luck
Good-Bye

Hello
How Are You?
How Much Is This Item?
I Am From India.
My Name Is Peter.
No
No Thank You
Ok
OK I Will Buy It.
Please Reduce The Cost A Bit.
Potato
Rice
See Ya Later
Thank You
What Is Your Name?
Where Is The Toilet?
Yes

Suja
Ema
Tashi Delek
Legshembe Joen
(If You're The Person Staying)
Legshembe Shug
(If You're The Person Leaving)
Kuzo Zangpo La
Ga De Bay Ye?
Di Gi Gong Ga Dem Chi Mo?
Nga India Lay In.
Nge Gi Ming Peter In.
Me
Miju
Toup
Toob, Nga Gi Nyo Ge.
Gong Aa Tsi Phab Nang.
Kewa
Chum
Shoo Lay Log Jay Ge
Kadrin Chhe
Chhoe Gi Ming Ga Chi Mo?
Chhabsang Ga Ti Mo?
Ing

Numbers

1	Chi	2	Ni
3	Sum	4	Shi
5	Nga	6	Du
7	Din	8	Gey
9	Gu	10	Chutham

CLIMATE

Bhutan has 11 climatic zones, in which banana trees and hardy rock plants grow within the space of a single vertical mile. The climate varies with altitude. Year-round snow in the north, heavy monsoon rains in the west, drier but temperate central and eastern areas and a humid and subtropical south.

Central Valleys - Cool winters, hot summers

Himalayas - Severe winters, cool summers. Violent storms coming down from the Himalayas are the source of the country's name which translates as Land of the Thunder Dragon. During the rainy season there are frequent landslides.

Temperatures in Thimphu range from approximately 15 to 26 C during the monsoon season of June through September but drop between -4 C and 16 C in January. Most of the central region experiences a cool, temperate climate year-round. In the south, a hot, humid climate helps maintain a fairly even temperature range of between 15 C and 30 C year-round, although temperatures sometimes reach 40C in the southern foothills during the summer.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURE & RAINFALL

<i>Paro</i>	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	.28	.59	1.0	1.3	1.2	2.1	3.9	4.2	2.4	.95	.25	na
Min Temp (F)	22	34	33	40	51	55	59	57	52	45	34	29
Max Temp (F)	48	55	57	63	74	77	80	77	74	65	57	52

<i>Thimpu</i>	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	.59	1.6	.91	2.3	4.8	9.6	14.7	13.6	6.1	1.5	.31	.12
Min Temp (F)	27	33	39	45	56	59	60	60	59	51	41	30
Max Temp (F)	54	58	62	68	72	76	77	77	74	71	61	58

<i>Punakha</i>	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	.29	.59	1.0	1.3	1.2	2.1	3.9	4.2	2.4	0.9	0.2	.08
Min Temp (F)	39	42	49	54	61	66	70	69	68	62	56	51
Max Temp (F)	72	73	77	82	86	89	91	92	92	89	87	86



THE LAND

Physically, Bhutan can be divided into three zones: Alpine Zone (4000m and above) with no forest cover; the Temperate Zone (2000 to 4000m) with conifer or broadleaf forests; and the Subtropical Zone (150m to 2000m) with Tropical or Subtropical vegetation. Because of its wide altitudinal and climatic range, the flora and fauna is diverse and rich.

Forest types in Bhutan are Fir Forests, Mixed Conifer Forest, Blue Pine Forest, Chirpine Forest, Broadleaf mixed with Conifer, Upland Hardwood Forest, Lowland Hardwood Forest, and Tropical Lowland Forests. Almost 60% of the plant species that is found in the eastern Himalayan region can be found in Bhutan as well.

Bhutan boasts of about 300 species of medicinal plants and about 46 species of rhododendrons. Some common sights for the visitors are the magnolias, junipers, orchids of varied hues, gentian, medicinal plants, daphne, giant rhubarb, the blue poppy which is the national flower and tropical trees such as pine and oaks.

A wide range of animal could also be found frequenting the jungles of Bhutan. Some high altitude species are the snow leopards, the Bengal tigers that are found at altitude ranging 3000 to 4000 meters, the red panda, the gorals and the langurs, the Himalayan black bear and sambars, the wild pigs and the barking deer, the blue sheep and the musk deer. In the tropical forests of Southern Bhutan one can come across the clouded leopards, the one horned rhinoceros, elephants, golden langur that is unique to Bhutan, the water buffaloes and the swamp deer.

Bhutan also has a great variety of bird species. It is recognized as an area of high biological diversity and is known as the East Himalayan 'hot spot' situated as it is at the hub of 221 global endemic bird areas. The recorded number of bird species is over 670 and there are chances that this number could still go up. In addition, 57% of Bhutan's globally threatened birds and 90% of the country's restricted rare birds are dependent on forests. Bhutan has about 415 resident bird species. These inhabitant birds are altitudinal refugees, moving up and down the mountains depending upon the seasons and weather conditions. Of about 50 species of birds that migrate in winters are the buntings, waders and ducks, thrushes and the birds of prey. Some 40 species are partial migrants and they include species such as swifts, cuckoos, the bee-eaters, fly catchers and the warblers.

Bhutan is also home to about 16 bird species that are endangered worldwide. These include the White bellied heron, Pallas Fish eagle, Blyth's King fisher to name a few. Phobjikha valley in Wangdue Phodrang and Bomdeling in Trashigang are also two important places in Bhutan that are visited by the endangered Black Necked Crane.



THE PEOPLE

Bhutanese people primarily consist of the Ngalops and Sharchops, called the Western Bhutanese and Eastern Bhutanese respectively. The Ngalops primarily consist of Bhutanese living in the western part of the country. Their culture is closely related to that of Tibet. Much the same could be said of the Sharchops, the dominant group, who originate from the eastern part of Bhutan (but who traditionally follow the Nyingmapa rather than the official Drukpa Kagyu form of Tibetan Buddhism). In modern times, with improved transportation infrastructure, there has been much intermarriage between these groups. In the early 1970s, intermarriage between the Lhotshampas and mainstream Bhutanese society was encouraged by the government.

The national language is Dzongkha, one of 53 languages in the Tibetan language family. The script, here called Chhokey ("Dharma Language"), is identical to classical Tibetan. In the schools English is the medium of instruction and Dzongkha is taught as the national language. Ethnologue lists 24 languages currently spoken in Bhutan, all of them in the Tibeto-Burman family, except Nepali, an Indo-Aryan language. Until the 1980s, the government sponsored the teaching of Nepali in schools in Southern Bhutan. However, after the armed uprising in the south, Nepali was dropped from the curriculum. The languages of Bhutan are still not well-characterized, and several have yet to be recorded in an in-depth academic grammar.

Bhutan has a rich and unique cultural heritage that has largely remained intact because of its isolation from the rest of the world until the early 1960s. One of the main attractions for tourists is the country's culture and traditions. Bhutanese tradition is deeply steeped in its Buddhist heritage. Hinduism is the second dominant religion in Bhutan, being most prevalent in the southern regions. The government is increasingly making efforts to preserve and sustain the current culture and traditions of the country. Because of its largely unspoiled natural environment and cultural heritage, Bhutan has been referred to as The Last Shangri-la.

WHAT TO PACK

Dress is normally casual in Bhutan. Most importantly, dress conservatively. Women should avoid sleeveless, tight or short garments. Bare legs above the knee are frowned upon for men and are verboten for women. When visiting monasteries, dzongs and other religious sites do not wear shorts or hats.

Due to altitude changes, there are 13 different climatic regions in Bhutan as well as four seasons. In spring and fall, bring layers that can accommodate temperatures varying from 32 degrees at night to the high seventies during the day.

Pack long johns, pants, cotton shirts and sweaters. Dark colors and tough fabrics are best, as 24-hour laundry service can be found only in Thimphu. You'll also need a windbreaker, a warm jacket, rain poncho, umbrella and a warm hat. Men should bring a sports jacket, women a longish skirt to wear when meeting government or religious officials.

Pack lip balm, sunblock, sunglasses, hat, mosquito repellent, tissue and a good pair of walking shoes.

DRUGS

It is recommended to travel with prescriptions for any drugs you are required to take with you for your personal health.

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CURRENCY

The monetary unit of Bhutan is the Ngultrum. Indian currency is also legal tender. Tourists are advised to carry their money in the form of traveler's checks (preferably American Express) with a little cash (US Dollars) which might be needed for incidental expenses.

CHANGING MONEY

In most of the world, currency exchange is a fairly straightforward process. In Bhutan, it involves several lines and just waiting around until you're called. Do not be surprised if you invest more than 30 minutes just exchanging money. It's best to avoid doing this more than once, so get what you need the first time. Another way of avoiding long waiting times is to ask your guide to assist in changing money. Locals do not have to give their passport details, etc and thus save time.

CREDIT CARDS

Major credit cards are widely accepted at mid-range and better hotels, restaurants and fancy shops. Elsewhere credit cards are not accepted and you will need to carry enough cash or travelers' checks to cover your costs.

INSURANCE

You should not assume your U.S. or other existing health insurance will cover you while traveling abroad. Since the standard of emergency treatment is not always as high as in the West, it is advisable for travelers to take out an additional travel policy that includes evacuation in addition to their normal medical insurance.

TIPPING

Tipping is not a natural part of many Western cultures but it makes up a significant proportion of many peoples wages, especially in third world countries. It is very important to tip your guides, drivers and porters (if you are trekking).

Service charges of 10% are added to bills in most leading hotels and restaurants.

Where it is not included, a tip of 10-15% of the bill would be appropriate.

Airport porter/hotel bellboy:

\$1.00 - \$ 2.00 US per bag.

Your tour guide:

\$20.00 - \$ 25.00 US per person per day.

Driver/assistants:

\$ 10.00 - \$ 15.00 US per person per day.

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SAFETY & CRIME

Common sense is all that is necessary: be discreet with money, and keep valuables, including passport and airline tickets, out of sight and in a safe place (larger hotels have safes). Minimize the money you carry with you, or carry it in a money-belt next to your body (inside clothing) and have change handy for minor purchases to avoid displaying the entire bank.

HEALTH

No immunizations are required to enter Bhutan, but many are recommended, including up-to-date tetanus and typhoid vaccinations, a polio update and a gamma globulin injection or Hepatitis A vaccine. Before traveling you need to consult with your health physician.

Gastrointestinal illness is a common result of Bhutan's abysmal sanitation and strikes nearly everyone sooner or later. The local version of Delhi Belly is simply a typical tourist's ailment.

Avoid untreated water (including ice cubes), raw vegetables and unpeeled fruit. Water needs to be filtered, then boiled to get the bugs out. To purify water, add five or six drops of Lugol's Solution (an iodine solution) per litre/quart of water, and let stand 20 minutes before drinking. Avoid food that has been left standing out and unboiled milk.

ETIQUETTE

The Bhutanese are very polite people. Handshaking is customary for both men and women upon introduction and smiling is definitely a national tradition. There are a few taboos - The use of the left hand to give and receive as well as crooking your finger to call someone are considered impolite. Improper dressing is probably the most significant and visible faux pas committed by visitors. Modesty applies to men as well as women, but women should be especially careful to cover the upper arms and legs and avoid tight or revealing clothing.

When entering homes, shoes are usually left at the door. The same applies to temples and monasteries, especially if the shoes are leather ones. Watch what others do. Children can become veritable pests in their desire to pose for photography, but it's polite to seek permission before photographing an adult: by smile and gesture, if not verbally.

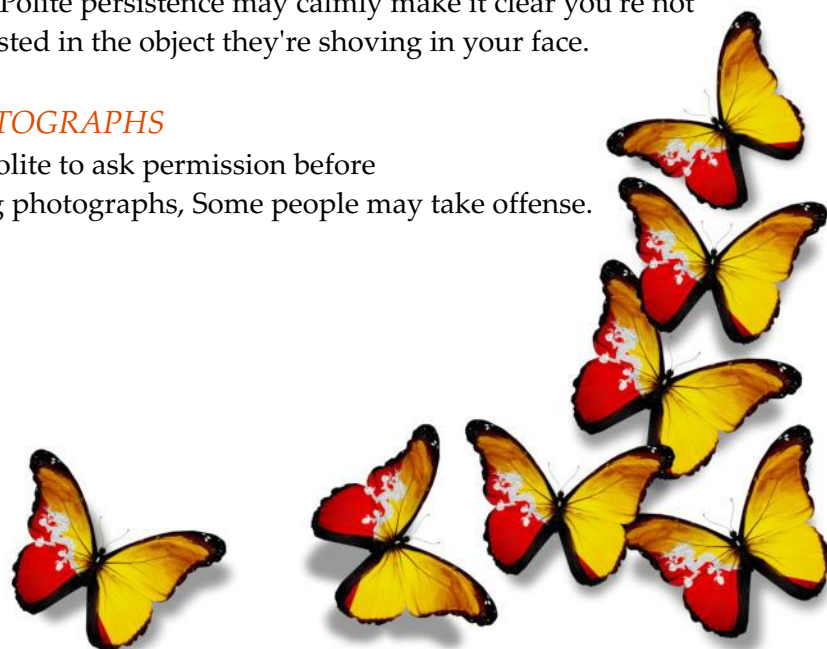
Don't sit or stand on statues, chortens, chaityas, prayer walls or any vaguely religious object. Buddhism matters here and pervades every aspect of daily life. When visiting a temple always walk clockwise around Buddhist stupas, chortens or mani walls. Always remove your shoes before entering a Buddhist or Hindu temple or sanctuary. There are many rules, but they are constantly repeated, so you won't make any mistakes. If you do, the Bhutanese will forgive you if they see you are trying to be reverent.

As in most of Asia, time is a malleable concept and promptness is a relative thing. If it does not happen today it may happen tomorrow. This charmingly, relaxed approach can be infuriating if you are waiting for something urgent.

Confrontation and aggression are avoided at all costs, and people will go to great lengths to save face and not push an issue or person to the wall. Polite persistence may calmly make it clear you're not interested in the object they're shoving in your face.

PHOTOGRAPHS

It is polite to ask permission before taking photographs. Some people may take offense.



COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone

Telephone & fax services were started in 1990 and now have been upgraded to international standard. It is now possible to direct dial from any part of the country. The Bhutan country is code +975. Telephone communication is very reliable in Bhutan.

Mobile Telephone

Bhutan currently has two Mobile Service Provider, TashiCell and Bhutan Mobile(B-Mobile). B-Mobile was introduced in the month of November 2005 and now covers up entire districts of Bhutan. It has two categories of services. Post Paid and Pre-Paid.

- 1) Post Paid: Monthly billing system.
- 2) Pre-paid as per the recharge Card
- 3) Sim Card is available at many dealer shops.

Internet

Internet Service in Bhutan was introduced in 1999 coinciding with the Silver Jubilee celebration (25 years ruling) of the 4th King. Now it is available in every tourist lodge/hotel as well as in town Cafés, and sometimes also Wireless.

Post

Mail service within the country and airmail abroad is available, but can be slow at times, unless it is registered or express mail. International parcel post is also available. Bhutanese stamps are particularly beautiful. Do not miss the Philatelic Bureau in Thimphu.

ELECTRICITY

220 Voltage, 50 cycles. Some hotels may use 110 volts. A converter is needed. Sockets usually take three round pin plugs, sometimes the small variety, sometimes the large. Some sockets take plugs with two round pins.



Media

The media in Bhutan is a fairly young development. The concept of the media, as a player in the growth of a modern society began in the mid 1980s, with the establishment of the first Bhutanese newspaper, Kuensel along with the Bhutan Broadcasting Station (BBS). In the late 1990s, ICT was introduced and electronic media was added to the list, followed by television a few years later. Today, Bhutanese media has grown considerably in all its forms – print, broadcast, film, music and internet.

Local Publications

- 1) Kuensel
- 3) Bhutan Observer
- 4) Bhutan Today
- 5) The Journalist
- 6) Bhutan Business
- 7) Druk Yodzer (only in Dzongkha)

SHOPPING

The handicraft industry is much smaller in Bhutan because there aren't as many tourists but there are plenty of shops in Thimphu (the capital) which sell a range of goods including wooden bowls, handmade paper, jewellery, masks and thangkas. Bhutan is renowned for its brightly coloured and boldly designed stamps, so it's paradise for stamp collectors!

BARTERING

The Bhutanese do not generally barter for products and a fixed price prevails. Bartering is often seen as offensive so it's best not to try it.

CUSTOMS

Customs regulations allow, per adult, a maximum of 2 litres of alcohol, Cigarettes and Tobacco are banned in Bhutan and are not allowed into the country, However if you are a smoker some shops sell illegally. Photographic equipment is limited to personal use.

Be careful of antique purchases as customs authorities will not allow any old/used item to be taken out of the country if they have not been certified as non-antiques, this usually is checked if they are Religious items. However most shops that sell curio items will have a clearance seal from the Special Commission.

Words of Wisdom-Buyer Beware

Bring your purchases home with you. Unless you are prepared to wait a prolonged period of time, do not have it shipped -- not even by air freight.

Do not purchase expensive goods of supposed high quality unless you are absolutely sure of what you are buying.

Unless you are an expert in gems, antiques, artifacts, etc., you should not assume that it is of the highest quality or value.

Always take the time to read the charge slips for credit card purchases before you sign them. This may seem obvious; but in the excitement of making a foreign purchase, travelers sometimes overlook this and are unpleasantly surprised when they return home and are billed by the credit card company. Taking a few moments to review the charge slip before signing it (and computing the exchange rate to be sure you are charged the right amount) can save you headaches.



FOOD

Although adherents of Buddhism, Bhutanese are not vegetarians and occasionally eat beef, especially in western Bhutan. Pork, poultry, goat and yak meat, and fish are consumed on a limited scale. Rice and corn are staples. Despite a scarcity of milk, dairy products, such as yak/cow cheese and yak/cow cheese by-products, are part of the diet of the upland people. Meat soups, rice or corn, and curries spiced with chilies comprise daily menus.

Bhutanese are fond of alcoholic drinks prepared locally known as "ara" and "Chang" brewed from rice, wheat and barley. The drinks are also used as part of the offering while performing ceremonies on different occasions. Similarly doma (betal-nut and leaf) is also a part of Bhutanese tradition. Salted butter called "suja" which may taste strange to western palettes is frequently offered together with puffed rice and maize.

At selected hotels you will find delicious Chinese, Continental, Indian and Bhutanese cuisine.

BEVERAGES

Nonalcoholic Drinks:

Indian style sweet milky tea (ngad-ja) is widely available and may be served in a pot. Bhutanese frequently drink sud-ja, Tibetan style tea with salt and butter, which is more like soup than tea, and surprisingly tasty and warming on a cold day. Filter coffee and espresso is available in the top end hotels and a few restaurants in Thimphu, but elsewhere 'coffee' is invariably of the instant variety.

Avoid tap water directly from the tap. Steps to purify water should be taken. The easiest of these is boiling your water. The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.



DRIED YAK MEAT

Alcoholic Drinks:

The only beer brewed in Bhutan is the very good Red Panda, an unfiltered wheat beer bottled in Bumthang. Throughout the country there's an ample supply of imported canned beer- Tiger from Singapore and Singha from Thailand, or several brands of Indian beer, which comes in large (650 mL) bottles. The most popular brands are Black Label, Golden Eagle and Dansberg from Sikkim.

There are several brands of whiskey including Special Courier, Black Mountain Whiskey (better known as 'BMW'), Royal Supreme and Changta, the cheapest. The better brands compare favorably with good Scotch whiskey. There are local rums: XXX Bhutan Rum is the strongest, and gins such as Crystal and Pacham.

The most common local brew is bang chhang, a warm beer -like drink made from wheat. The favourite hard drinks are arra, a spirit distilled from rice, and sinchhang, which is made from millet, wheat or rice.

CULTURE & THE ARTS

Zorig Chusum: the thirteen traditional crafts of Bhutan

Though the thirteen traditional arts and crafts were practiced right from the immemorial times, it is commonly understood that it was formally categorized during the reign of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgay, the fourth temporal ruler of Bhutan. The thirteen arts and crafts are categorized as follows:

Shing zo

When considering the history of human dwellings, the use of timber predates the use of stones. Evidence of buildings framed with timber can be found in many countries, including even the pyramids of Egypt. Most virgin primeval forests that existed were used for structural framework and this began to develop into an art. Large temples were built simply using timber and without any metal fasteners. Instead, they were joined together using notches with thick pegs and nails made of wood, and these wooden structures were designed to last for centuries. Slowly, in many countries, woodworking became a profession and the craftsmen became the engineers, architects, carpenters and builders of their age. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, this craft began to disappear from many parts of the world as mechanization of works began when many industries appeared.

While most people across the world are trying to rediscover and learn the secrets of this old tradition, the Bhutanese still practice this ancient art termed shingzo. The master craftsman known locally as Zow chen and Zows are instrumental in fashioning intricate designs that goes into the construction of our fortresses-the Dzongs, our palaces, our temples and monasteries and the traditional Bhutanese farm houses. The Dzongs that have its origin in the 17th century features some of the most elaborate wood works and designs that draw appreciation not only from the Bhutanese populace but from outside visitors as well.

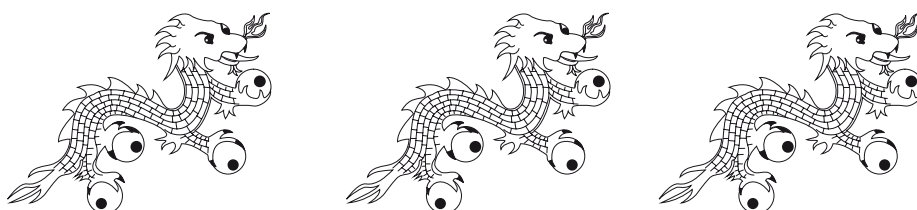
People interested in becoming carpenters serve as apprentice under a master carpenter for a few years till they develop the confidence to practice the skills on their own. Master carpenters are found all over the kingdom and for every important structure to be raised they are called upon to contribute. A master carpenter who is still revered today is the Zow Balep, whose architectural skills can still be witnessed today in the ancient fortress of Punakha Dzong.

Do zo

Do zo as it is widely known is an old craft that is still being practiced today by the Bhutanese. Just as the many temples and palaces that have been built in stone the world over, the Bhutanese temples, Dzongs, the Chortens or the stupas and the farm houses are all built of stones. Indeed no construction ever takes place without the use of stones. Classic examples of stone work are those of Chorten Kora in Tashiyangtse in eastern Bhutan and Chendebji chorten in central Bhutan.

De zo

Paper-making is another art that has found roots in Bhutan. People engaged in producing the traditional Bhutanese paper or De zo are known as Dezop. Traditional papers were widely used in the past and most of the religious scriptures and texts were written on Dezho's using traditional Bhutanese ink and at times in gold. While the presence of readily available modern paper has overtaken the market, yet people still produce Deshos which is used as carrying bags, wrappers for gifts and even used as envelopes. The art still continues in Trashiyangtse where the raw material is readily available.



Lug zo

The period in history between the Stone Age and Iron Age is known as the Bronze Age because bronze was commonly used to cast containers such as cups, urns, and vases. People also shaped bronze into battle-axes, helmets, knives, shields, and swords. They also made it into ornaments, and sometime even into primitive stoves. Bronze was developed about 3500 BC by the ancient Sumerians in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. Historians are unsure of how this alloy was discovered, but they believe that bronze may have first been made accidentally when rocks, rich in copper and tin, were used to build campfire rings. As fire heated these stone, the metals may have melted and mixed, forming bronze. This theory is supported by the fact that bronze was not developed in North America, where natural tin and copper ores are rarely found in the same rocks. Bronze appeared in both Egypt and China around 2000 B.C. The earliest bronze castings were made in sand, and this method is still used today, even for casting bells. However, clay and stone moulds were developed later on. Clay is usually used nowadays for making bells. Bronze casting in Bhutan was introduced only in the 17th century and was mainly spread through the visiting Newari artisans that came from Nepal. The Newars of Nepal were first invited by Zhabdrung Nawang Namgyal to cast bronze statues and religious items such as bells and water offering bowls. It was through these artisans that the art was introduced and today, a lot of Bhutanese people are into bronze casting.

Par zo

Par zo or carving is another traditional art that has been perfected by the Bhutanese. The major carvings are carried out on stone, wood and slate. The traditional designs crafted on these materials create some distinctive art works.

Since Bhutan has been blessed with an abundant variety of wood, woodcarving is seen in a variety of forms. The wooden masks that feature during the annual religious festivals are all carved out of wood besides the many traditional motifs that are engraved on the Bhutanese houses and on Dzongs. Besides, a unique wood carving that draws attraction are the phalluses of various sizes and shapes that are hung on the four corners of the Bhutanese houses and stuck onto the main entrance of the door ways. These carved wooden phalluses are also displayed by the Acharyas- the clowns during the religious festivals as a sign to bless the spectators and drive away the evils and misfortunes.

Another important art that is being practiced is the art of slate carving. The master craftsman is known as Do Nag Lopen and the material used is the slate found in abundance in both western and Eastern Bhutan. While slate carving is not as diverse as stone and wood work, yet one can come across many religious scriptures, mantras and images of deities being carved onto slates besides the religious figures. Slate works are found mostly in religious places such as Dzongs, temples and chortens.

Another important craft that has survived in Bhutan is the stone carving. While it is certainly less evident, yet the water driven grinding mills are classic examples of stone works. The huge grinding mills are still used by people in the far flung villages of Bhutan. One can also come across hollowed – out stones used for pounding grains and troughs for feeding cattle and horses.



Lha zo

Bhutanese paintings represent the quintessential of the Bhutanese art and craft tradition. An old art that has been practiced since antiquity, painting captures the imagery of the Bhutanese landscape. The work of master painters known as Lha Rip are reflected in every architectural piece be it the massive Dzongs, the temples and the monasteries, the nunneries and the stupas or a modest Bhutanese home. Indeed, paintings and the varied colors and hues epitomize the Bhutanese art and craft.

The art of painting is revered and painters are believed to accumulate merit. Young novices are taught by the master Lha Rips and the huge scrolls of thangkha or thongdrols that depicts religious figures and displayed during religious festivals are some classic works. A mere sight of these huge scrolls is believed to deliver us to nirvana. Thus, it brings merit not only to the believers but for the painters as well. The materials used in Bhutan are the natural pigmented soils that are found in most places in the country. These natural soil pigments are of different colours and are named accordingly. The black lumps of soil is known as 'sa na', and red lumps as 'Tsag sa', for instance.

Jim zo

Jim zo or clay work is an ancient craft having been practiced and passed on over the centuries. This art work preceded other sculpture works such as bronze

or other metal works. Statues of deities, gods and goddesses and other prominent religious figures in fact exemplify clay work in Bhutan. Every monastery, temple and the Dzongs have in them installed clay statues from where pilgrims and devout Buddhists draw their inspiration from. The master craftsmen are known as Jim zo lopen and the skill is imparted to the young novices through vigorous trainings spread over the years.

Besides the clay statues, the tradition of clay potteries is still alive though much of the potteries are now being used as show pieces and flower vases. While the art of modeling statues are confined to men, the art of pottery is normally the handiwork of women. While we find three distinctive types of clayware: earthenware, stoneware and the china-clayware, in Bhutan, we find only the first type, the earthenware. What is required for success in the work on clay is the composition of clay by using balanced materials, skills in shaping the wet clay and firing to the correct temperature. The baked items were then coated with lac to render them waterproof. While this tradition is almost dying the women of Lhuentse and Paro still try and keep this tradition alive.

Gar zo

The art blacksmithing began with the Iron Age when primitive man first began making tools from iron. Thus, the art of crafting the crude metal found in certain type of rocks and soil into a usable implement has been around for a long time. Some of the tools that man used were spear or arrow-tips, crude axes and knives as well as agricultural implements.

Iron smelters were small furnaces built from rock that could withstand repeated heating. These furnaces looked like beehives with an opening at the top and an entrance on the side. The furnace was filled with iron-ore and charcoal and then set to fire. When the temperature rises above 2,800 Fahrenheit, the iron flows and forms balls, which are later hammered and made into various implements.

Black smithy in Bhutan began sometime in the late 14th century and it is believed that it was introduced by a Tibetan saint known as Dupthob Thangtong Gyalpo. He has been revered as the master engineer for his skill in casting iron chains and erecting them as bridges over gorges. In Bhutan, he is supposed to have built about eight suspension bridges and one can still come across a bridge over Paro Chu linking the highway to the famous Tachog lhakhang in Paro. One can also come across the remains of these once highly used iron chains in Trashigang and at the National Museum in Paro.

While blacksmithy is almost a dying art, yet one can still come across the Tibetan settlers especially in Trashigang practicing this art.

ALLURING
A S I A

Troe ko

Ornaments are widely used by the Bhutanese women and the tradition of making ornaments is still vibrant in Bhutan. Master craftsmen who skill in shaping beautiful ornaments are regarded as Tro Ko Lopen. Using precious stones such as corals and turquoise, silver and gold, these master craftsmen shape out ornaments such as necklaces, bangles, earrings, rings worn on fingers, brooches, amulets to contain ritual objects, traditional containers to carry the much chewed beetle nuts, ritual objects and many more.

Tsha zo

Most of the forests in Bhutan are richly stocked with bamboos and canes of various species. Taking advantage of the abundant natural resources, people have mastered their skills in weaving cane and bamboo products. Widely known as Tshar Zo, this art is spread throughout the country products such as baskets, winnowers, mats, containers known as Palangs and bangchungs are all made of bamboo. However, the people of Kangpara in eastern Bhutan and the Bjokaps of Central Bhutan are pioneer master craftsmen. Their products are now sold out to tourists earning them an additional income.

Tshem zo

Tzhem zo or the art of tailoring is a popular art amongst the Bhutanese. This art can be broadly classified as Tshem drup or the art of embroidery, lhem drup or the art of appliqué and Tsho lham or the art of traditional Bhutanese boots. The art of embroidery and appliqué are normally practiced by the monks. Using this art they produce large religious scrolls known as Thangkas that depicts Gods and Goddesses, deities and saints.

Traditional boots are normally the work of Bhutanese lay men. These boots worn by officials during special functions and gatherings are made of leather and cloth. While boot making is an old craft, its origin is unknown. Special craftsmen in the villages also make simple boots from uncured leather. However, this is a vanishing practice in the villages though it has picked up recently in the urban centers with support from the government.

The third category is the simple tailors that skill in sewing the Bhutanese traditional dresses known as Gho and Kira.

Thag zo

An integral part of the Bhutanese life is the textile. As such the art of weaving is widely practiced in Bhutan. However, women of eastern Bhutan are skilled in weaving and some of the highly priced textiles are all woven by them. In the past, textiles were paid as tax to the government in place of cash and people from western Bhutan travelled all the way to Samdrup Jongkhar to buy woven textiles. Textiles are woven of cotton, raw cotton and silk and intricate motifs are woven into the cloth.



Khoma village in Lhuentse is famous for Kushithara, while Rahi and Bidung are known for bura textiles namely Mentsi Matha and Aikapur. One type of cotton fabric woven in Pemagatshel is the Dungsam Kamtham. Decheling village in Samdrup Jongkhar is known for their cotton fabric as the Decheling Kamtham derived from the name of their village.

Adang village in Wangdue Phodrang is known for textiles such as Adang Mathra, Adang Rachu and Adang Khamar while the Bumthaps in central Bhutan are known for Bumthap Mathra and Yathra, both textiles woven out of Yak and sheep hair. People of Nabji and Korphu in Trongsa are known for textiles woven out of nettle fibers. Weaving is also a vocation amongst the Brokpas of Merak and Sakteng. Men contribute in spinning wool into threads. They weave from yak hair and sheep wool.

There are four types of looms that are used by the Bhutanese weavers. They are the blackstrap looms, the horizontal fixed looms, the horizontal framed looms and the card looms. The predominant type is the back strap loom and is used mostly by weavers from eastern Bhutan. They are set up on the porches or in thatched sheds to protect weavers and the cloth from the sun and rain. Card looms and horizontal frame looms are also used. The back straps are the indigenous looms while the horizontal frame looms and the card looms made their entry into Bhutan from Tibet.

Shag zo

The art of wood turning is known as Shag Zo and is traditionally practiced by the people of Trashiyangtse in eastern Bhutan. As a vibrant art, the master craftsmen are known as Shag Zopa. They are famed for wooden cups and bowls traditionally known as dapas and phobs. These wooden bowls made of special wooden knots known as Zaa are highly priced and till the advent of steel and brass plates were once used as plates by the Bhutanese people at large. Today they are being sold to the outside visitors and offered as gifts.

Another village that practices wood turning is the small village in eastern Bhutan known as Khengkhar. The villagers here are known for producing traditional wooden wine containers known as jandup.

ALLURING
ASIA



