



ABOUT BHUTAN

The land of the thunder dragon kingdom is a trekker's paradise and an environmentalist's dream. With 72 percent of the country under forest cover, Bhutan's pristine ecology is home to rare and endangered flora and fauna.

This spiritual land is the last bastion of the Vajrayana school of Mahayana Buddhism which provides the essence of a unique identity for the 750,000 people.

Bhutan is a unique blend of the old and new. Here is a country that is slowly opening up to the modern world in a fine balance with its ancient traditions.

Those fortunate enough to visit **Bhutan** describe it as a unique, deeply spiritual and mystical experience.

This kingdom is an adventure like no other.

Facts and Figures

Land area: 38,394 square kilometres

Forest area: 72.5 %

Altitude: between 240metres and 7541metres above sea level

Inhabitants: 634,982

Language: official language "Dzongkha", English widely spoken

Religion: Vajrayana stream of Mahayana Buddhism (Also known as Tantric Buddhism)

Currency: Ngultrum (equal to Indian Rupee)

Capital: Thimphu

National Tree: Cypress

National Bird: Raven

National Flower: Blue Poppy

Getting to Bhutan

The way to Bhutan

Till Bhutan embarked on a planned economic development in the early 1960's, Bhutan by and large remained cut off from the rest of the world. The country was accessible only by foot. The two main entry points to the country was from the North and from the South. From the north, the entry was from Tibet and was possible crossing the high passes while from the South it was through the plains of Assam and West

Bengal. However, with the planned economic development, accessibility became easy with motorable roads connecting Bhutan with the other parts of the country.

Today the main points of entry are through Phuentsholing in the south that links Bhutan with the Indian plains of West Bengal, through Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar that links with the Indian state of Assam and through Paro, where the entry is through Druk Air, the National airline of Bhutan.

Travel by Air

The country has so far only one airport that caters to the needs of visitors coming in through flight. However, an international airport is under construction in Gelephu that will eventually provide passengers with a choice of their entry to Bhutan. The Bhutan's only international airport at Paro, is located at a height of 7300 ft above sea level and surrounded by mountains and hills as high as 16,000 feet. Druk Air is the national air operating with two A319. It flies to destinations that include Bangkok, Delhi, Kolkata, Bodh Gaya, Dacca, Kathmandu and Guwahati in Assam and Plans are also underway to invite other private airliners.

The flight between Paro and Kathmandu is one of the most exciting ones as the aircraft passes over 4 of the 5 highest mountains in the world. In fine weather, as you soar higher up, you can enjoy the spectacular display of Mt. Everest, Lhotse, Makalu und Kangchenjunga at their best.

Travel by Land

Phuentsholing, Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar in eastern Bhutan are the only land border areas open for international tourists. The town of Phuentsholing is located approximately 170 km east of the Indian national airport Bagdogra. After crossing Phuentsholing, your journey then begins its mountainous climb through endless turns and hair-pin bends till you enter Thimphu, the capital city. The travel time for the 176 km stretch can be more than 6 hours.

Gelephu in South-Central Bhutan is another entry point to Bhutan. It is approximately 250 kms from Thimphu and the journey will take you through the sub-tropical areas of Bhutan before entering the alpine zone and then finally into Thimphu. One will have to traverse across three Districts and the travel time will be about ten hours.

Samdrup Jongkhar is the only entry point in eastern Bhutan. The town borders the Indian district of Darranga, Assam and is approximately 150 kms away from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. The journey from Guwahati is about three hours. Tourists entering Bhutan through Samdrup Jongkhar will take you to Trashigang, the largest District in the country, and from there over the lateral route to Mongar, Bumthang, Trongsa, Wangde Phodrang and then finally into capital, Thimphu. The distance is about 700 kms and will take you a minimum of three days to reach Thimphu.

By Air

There is one national airline and one Nepal Airline called Buddha airline that flies to Bhutan. The contact addresses of the Druk Air offices are as follows:

In India:

New Delhi Tel: 91-11-335-7703

Email: druk_delhi@hotmail.com

Kolkata Tel: 91-33-240-2419

Email: drukcal@vsnl.et

In Bhutan:

Paro International Airport Tel: +975-8-271856/271857

Email: drukair@druknet.bt

Visit www.drukair.com.bt for more information

By Land

You can enter into Bhutan from any of the three entry points: Samdrup Jongkhar (southeast Bhutan), Gelephu (south Bhutan), and Phuntsholing (southwest Bhutan)

Entry Permit

You will be endorsed by the immigration officers upon your arrival before you are issued with a permit. Make sure you go personally. You may have to carry your passport (also some passport photographs) or voter's registration card. If you plan to travel by road, the endorsement is done at the entry points in Phuentsholing, Samdrup Jongkhar, and Gelephu. If by flight, you will enter from the Paro Airport.

What to do

Adventure

- Fishing
- Hiking
- Mountain biking / motorcycling
- Paragliding
- Rafting and Kayaking
- Rock climbing

Cultural

- Cultural sight seeing
- Textile tour

Nature

- Bird watching
- Flora and fauna

Spiritual and Wellness

- Retreat and Meditation
- Spa and Wellness
- Traditional Medicine

Trekking

- Bumthang Cultural Trek
- Bumthang Owl Trek
- Chelela Trek
- Dagala Thousand Lakes Trek
- Dongla Trek
- Druk Path Trek
- Dur Hot Spring Trek
- Gangjula Trek
- Gangkar Puensum

- Gantey Trek
- Jomolhari Trek
- Laya Gasar Trek
- Lingmithang – Zhemgang Trek
- Merak-Sakteng
- Nabji Korphu Community Based Trek
- Nubtsona Pata Trek
- Punakha Winter Trek
- Rigsum Goenpa Trek
- Royal Heritage Trek
- Sagala Trek
- Samtengang Trek
- Sinchula Trek
- Snowman Trek
- Wild East Rodungla Trek

Tshechu and Festival

- Chorten Kora
- Gomkora
- Jambay Lakhang Drup
- Kurjey Tsechu
- Lhuntse Tsechu
- Merak Tsechu
- Mongar Tsechu
- Nabji Korphu Tsechu
- Nalakhar Tsechu
- Nimalung Tsechu
- Paro Tsechu
- Pemagatse Tsechu
- Prakhar Duchhoed
- Punakha Dromche
- Sakteng Tsechu
- Tamshingphala Choepa
- Tangbi Mani
- Tashigang Tsechu
- Thimphu Drupchen
- Thimphu Tsechu
- Trongsa Tsechu
- Ura Matsutake Festival
- Ura Yakchoe
- Wangdue Tsechu

Travel Requirements

Tourists can book a package holiday to Bhutan through both International and Bhutanese local tour operators. Information is available from travel agencies.

The Royal Government of Bhutan sets minimum selling prices for packages to Bhutan and this must be paid in US dollars prior to arrival in Bhutan.

Daily Tariff

The minimum tariff for tourist visiting in a group of 3 persons or more are as follows:

High Season Tariff – US\$ 200 per person per night halt (February, March, April, May, August, September, October, November and December).

Low Season Tariff – US\$165 per person per night halt (January, June, July).

The minimum price includes:

- All internal taxes and charges (including the royalty)
- Accommodation
- All Meals
- All travel with a licensed Bhutanese Tour Guide
- All Internal Transport
- Camping Equipment and Haulage for Trekking Tours

The rates given above are applicable per tourist per night halt in Bhutan. On the day of departure, the 'local agents' host obligation shall be limited to breakfast only and any extra requirements shall be payable on actual basis.

The rates shall apply uniformly irrespective of locations and the type of accommodation provided/asked for.

List of hotels and lodges approved for international tourist accommodation updated from time to time shall be issued by TCB.

Note: Minimum package cost is revised starting 1st January 2012. USD\$ 250 per person per night for the months of March, April, May, September, October, and November. And USD\$200 per person per night for the months of January, February, June, July, August, and December. For more information please check with TCB.

Surcharges

Individual tourists and smaller groups of less than three persons shall be subject to surcharge, over and above the minimum daily rates applicable, as follows:

Single individual US\$ 40 per night

Group of 2 persons US\$ 30 per person per night

The 10% agency commission payable to agents abroad shall not be deductible from the surcharge.

The surcharge will not be applicable to representatives of foreign travel agents on business study or promotional visit duly approved and cleared by TCB.

Discounts

- a) With effect from 01/07/2009, the government has revoked the 25% discount on Diplomatic visas.
- b) There shall be no charge for CHILDREN up to the age of 5 years. However, those between the ages of 6-12 years accompanied by elders/ guardians shall be given 50% discount on daily rates and 100% discount on Royalty.
- c) Full time STUDENTS below the age of 25 years holding valid identity cards from their academic institutions shall also be given a 25% discount on daily rates.
- d) A discount of 50% on daily rates shall be given to one person in a group of 11 to 15 people. 100% discount shall be given to one member in a group exceeding 16 persons.

e) 50%discount on Royalty shall be provided from the 9th night and 100% discount on Royalty shall be provided from the 14th night.

f) Visitors availing discounts under Sections A, B & C shall not be eligible for discount under E.

Detailed information on Druk Air flights, tour and trekking programmes, festivals, places of interest, hotels etc can be obtained from the tour operators.

Visa Formalities

Other than Indian, Bangladeshis and Maldivian nationals, all visitors to Bhutan require a visa; all visas are issued from Thimphu; visas are only issued to tourists booked with a local licensed tour operator, directly or through a foreign travel agent. Applications for tourist visas are submitted by the tour operator. Visa clearance from Thimphu must be obtained before coming to Bhutan. Visa clearance takes at least 10 days to process. Air tickets to Bhutan cannot be purchased without visa clearance. At your point of entry the visa will be stamped in your passport on payment of US\$20, two passport photos will also be required. Visas are issued for a 15day period; extensions can be obtained in Thimphu at a cost of Nu.510.