

## **Bhutan Infos and Facts**

### **Introduction**

Bhutan's early history is shrouded in mystery. Excavation of stone tools reveal that the country was inhabited as early as 2000-1500 BC. However, the written historical records available today begin in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with the visit of Guru Padmasambhava, more popularly known as Guru Rinpoche, in 746 AD. Guru Rinpoche brought Buddhism to Bhutan. Today, several forms of Buddhism are practiced in Bhutan. Prior to advent of Buddhism, an animistic religion known as Bon was practiced across the country. Even today, Bon rituals and traditions are practiced by some segments of society during their local festivities. Between the 7th and 17th century, many wise men, known as Lamas, visited Bhutan. Among them, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1652) who came from Tibet in 1616 strategically reengineered the theocracy, administration and legal structure of Bhutan. From handmade to mechanization, from mechanization to computerization, Bhutan has today come a long way in its humble journey towards sovereignty, development and self-reliance.

Bhutan, popularly known as the Last Shangri-La or the Land of the Thunder Dragon, is perhaps the last bastion of Mahayana Buddhism in the Himalayan region. Buddhism is not just a religion for the people of Bhutan but a philosophy practiced as a way of life. It creates an ambiance throughout the country, which can best be described as "open-heartedness and amicability".

Sandwiched between India in the south and Tibetan autonomous region of China in the north and northwest, Bhutan is spread over 46,500 square kilometers of land with varied climatic conditions. With a population of around 0.7 million, Bhutan has carved a niche for its unspoiled ancient cultures and rich heritage. Under the dynamic and farsighted leadership of His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, Bhutan opened its tourism industry to the external world in 1976. Until 1991, the tourism industry functioned under a strict code of regulation. However, after 1991, the industry was partially privatized through the appointment of Tourism Authority of Bhutan as the overseeing authority.

Bhutan's development policy is being guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Along the pragmatic lines of GNH, Bhutan has successfully drawn a fine line between the forces of modernization and environmentalism. Owing to deep traditional reverence that the Bhutanese people have for nature, the Kingdom is one of the leading countries in environmental preservation. More than 70% of land area is still under forest cover. Its rich Himalayan flora and fauna, astounding white peaks and lush green valleys provide Bhutan with its aesthetic grandeur. It is often said that even the most experienced explorer will find Bhutan to be "a revelation". The air is clean and unpolluted; the mountains majestic and the architecture awe inspiring!

### **The facts you need to know about TRAVEL IN BHUTAN**

#### **Planning Your Trip to Bhutan**

All travel in Bhutan is organized on a pre-planned and pre-paid basis and must be arranged through a travel company.

#### **Visa Requirements**

To enter Bhutan, you are required to have a visa. In order to help us process your Visa on time, you are required to submit your visa application form to Bhutan Journeys within 4-5 weeks of the anticipated date of arrival.

#### **Entry and Exit by Air**

Druk Air, the Royal Bhutan national airline, is the only way to enter and exit Bhutan by airplane. Druk Air has a fleet of one Air Bus 319-115 and two 72 British Aerospace (BAE) 146-100 Aircraft with a capacity to accommodate 114 and 72 passengers respectively. **Druk Air operates from Bangkok, Delhi, Kolkatta, Bangladesh and Katmandu on fixed schedules.** Flight schedules vary according to seasons. Druk Air operates additional flights during the peak travel seasons.

Air fares are payable in US dollars and are determined by the Druk Air Corporation. In the interest of ease and convenience, you are advised to book your tickets through Bhutan Journeys.

***NOTE: During monsoons, unpredictable weather forces can delay flights and travelers are advised to include an extra day in their itinerary.***

### **Entry and Exit by Land**

Bhutan is also accessible by land through Phuentsholing, located on the southwestern border of India. The road from Bagdogra, the nearest Indian airport, to Phuentsholing takes approximately four hours. Entry and exit to Bhutan by road also provides an opportunity to tourists desiring to visit the neighboring Indian States of Sikkim and West Bengal.

### **Customs**

Upon arrival, all visitors are required to fill in the Customs Declaration form and submit the same to the customs officials. Please note that export and import of all kinds of antiques, plants or animal products is strictly prohibited.

### **Currency**

The currency of Bhutan is called Ngultrum (Nu.). For economic reasons, the Bhutanese ngultrum is equivalent to the Indian Rupees (Rs.) which is also accepted in the country as legal tender. Major currencies and travelers cheques can be exchanged in the banks and some hotels. Credit cards are accepted at only a few of the hotels and shopping establishments in the country.

### **Language**

Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan, however, English is common. It is the language used in the education system across the country, alongside the native language. Nepali is prevalent in the south while Bumthangkha, Khyengkha and Shar chopkha are common dialects in the central and eastern Bhutan.

### **Accommodations**

Hotels and lodges built in the traditional Bhutanese style are found in all of Bhutan's major towns. Accommodations will always include rooms with private baths (toilet and shower), heating gadgets, daily linen service, and food. In eastern and central Bhutan, accommodations are simple with access to basic facilities. A Bhutan Journey will select the best available hotels with hospitable ambience and excellent services.

### **Food**

Bhutanese dishes are rich with spicy chili and cheese flavors. Bhutan's hotels have a choice of Bhutanese, Indian, Chinese and Japanese dishes, as well as some other continental foods. Other foods are also available to accommodate your preferences and needs.

### **Beverages and Drinks**

Bhutan is known across the world for its excellent production of beverages and drinks. Alcohol is widely available at reasonable prices. In rural areas, you can get home brewed Ara, which is similar to Japanese Saki. Other imported beverages are also served at the hotels. Bottled mineral water is available throughout the country.

### **Climate**

Bhutan's climatic conditions can be described in three broad zones: subtropical in the south, temperate in the central and alpine in the north. The seasons in the temperate zone of Bhutan are similar to the seasons in Western Europe. It is difficult to accurately generalize about the weather in Bhutan due to the variation in the elevation, rising from 200 m (650ft) in the south to 7000m (23,000ft) in the north, in a distance of only 161km (100mi). The rainy season is from June to mid September.

### **Power and Electricity**

Electricity is available in all of the towns frequently visited by tourists. The voltage supply is 220/240. Tourists intending to carry electrical appliances are advised to bring a converter with an adapter kit.

### **Time**

Bhutan time is 6 hours ahead of GMT and there is only one time zone across the country.

### **Clothing**

Between late May and early October it is summer with temperatures ranging from 5 to 27 Celsius (40–80 F) and monsoon season, with heavy rainfall, is from June to August. Light layers of natural or synthetic fabrics are recommended, with heavier outer layers for the evening, such as sweaters or fleece jackets. A light raincoat or umbrella is useful for the rainy moments and waterproof gear is recommended for longer treks

### **Health Information**

Good health facilities are available in the major towns. However, it is always advisable to take caution while traveling to rural areas by drinking only bottled water. For trekkers, it is most important to acclimatize to higher altitudes.

### **Communication Facilities**

Telecommunication facilities are available across the country. With the introduction of internet to Bhutan in 1999, visitors can access internet facilities in all major towns and cities.

### **Photography**

To capture the beauty of Bhutan, you are advised to carry plenty of film and batteries. You cannot count on being able to purchase the most current photographic supplies: e.g., batteries and digital disks. Only a few things are available in some places.

### **Insurance**

In order to protect against unforeseen accidents and mishaps, it is advisable to have travel insurance policy from your country. The policy coverage should include helicopter evacuation and medical assistance, among others, since such policies are not available in Bhutan.

### **Safety**

Bhutan is safe place as crime rate is almost negligible. The towns and cities are safe to enable you to roam without any danger.

### **Shopping**

Shopping malls in Bhutan are filled with traditional handicrafts, textiles, jewelry, baskets, masks, paintings and woodcarvings, all of which make excellent souvenirs.

### **Transportation**

In order to ensure your conformable travel, A Bhutan Journey has a fleet of Japanese imported vehicles like Land Cruiser, Toyota Cars, Minibuses, etc.

### **Architecture:**

A most striking feature is its unique architecture. The style and color, which characterize most buildings and houses in the kingdom is a distinct source of aesthetic pleasure. The dzongs themselves – imposing 17<sup>th</sup> century structures built on a grand scale without drawing and without a single nail, is outstanding examples of the best in Bhutanese architecture. Patterns of rich colors and adorn every wall, beam, pillar and door in traditional splendor.