

Bhutan



Climate: Seasonality is a function of altitude in Bhutan, and temperatures vary according to how high you are. Generally, spring and fall are the best times to visit Bhutan. In spring, rhododendrons, magnolias and other flowers are blooming. In fall, just after the monsoon season, mountain views are clearest and people are beginning to harvest crops. Late May, June, and early July, although possibly cloudy with occasional showers, will be very green, with fewer tourists. Planting is usually finished and the locals have more leisure time. Late July, August, and September typically are referred to as monsoon season in Bhutan. During winter, in December and January it is cold and possibly snowy, making trekking and driving over mountain road passes more difficult.

Average temperature (in Celsius)

Places	January	April	July	October
Paro	-5.8 - 9.4	4.6 - 17.6	14.9 - 26.8	7.4 - 18.7
Thimphu	-2.6 - 12.3	7.1 - 20.0	13.4 - 28.9	10.4 - 21.9
Punakha	4.2 - 16.1	11.9 - 24.4	21.6 - 32	18.9 - 27.8
Wangdue	4.3 - 17.0	12.9 - 26.2	16.2 - 28.4	14.7 - 26.1
Tongsa	-0.2 - 13.0	6.6 - 20.1	15.3 - 25.3	11.7 - 21.8
Bumthang	-5.1 - 10.8	3.9 - 18.7	10.9 - 24.1	5.9 - 19.5
Mongar	8.2 - 15.5	14.0 - 22.8	15.8 - 26.1	15.8 - 22.7
Tashigang	10.5 - 20.4	17.0 - 28.3	23.1 - 31.5	17.7 - 29.1

Currency: The local currency is the Ngultrum. Until 2011, credit cards were not accepted in Bhutan and there were no ATMs. Now, there are ATMs in both Paro and Thimphu, and some stores will take dollars, and accept Visa or Mastercard. Nevertheless, relying totally on credit cards is still not recommended when traveling to Bhutan.

We recommend taking US cash instead of Travelers Checks. Remember to plan ahead and change money in Thimphu or Paro before heading out to more remote areas. NOTE: \$50 and \$100 notes often get a better exchange rate than \$20s, and \$20s get a better exchange rate than smaller bills. Although it's possible to cash travelers checks if you carry well-known brands such as American Express, you will need a passport on your person. Travelers checks may not be widely accepted outside of major cities, such as Paro or Thimphu. Go to finance.yahoo.com/currency?u for current exchange rates.

Visas: Bhutan requires that all visitors apply for a visa PRIOR to entry. Myths and Mountains will arrange this and provide your visa approval document for Bhutan about two weeks prior to departure. We will need a CLEAR (preferably color) copy of your passport as early as possible to apply on your behalf. Typically scanning and e-mailing us your passport copy works best. You will need to present the visa approval document along with your e-ticket (also provided by M&M) in order to board the plane to Paro. Upon arrival in Bhutan, your visa is then stamped at the airport.



Note: Many countries require that your passport be valid 6 months after travel. *Be sure to check your expiration date and renew your passport if it expires within 6 months of travel!*

TRAVEL FORMALITIES

Land entry

There are a couple of land gateways for entering Bhutan.

- 1) **Phuntsoling:** If traveling in Sikkim and Darjeeling, this is the logical point of entry.
- 2) **Sandrup Jonkhar:**
 - a) Sandrup Jonkhar is the gateway from Northeast India (from or to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh).
 - b) Those traveling in Eastern Bhutan may choose to fly into Guwahati Airport in India, where they will be met by our reps and driven to the Bhutan Border. NOTE: The same is true for exiting, in which case, you'll be taken to the airport.

NOTE: If entering Bhutan by land, Myths and Mountains will arrange the transition between your guide in India and your guide in Bhutan, and will handle the entry formalities for you.

Air entry

Myths and Mountains will book your flights to and from Paro depending on your itinerary and gateway cities. The most common gateway cities are **Delhi** and **Bangkok**. Additionally, you can fly from **Kolkata** or **Kathmandu** to and from Paro. **You will need to send us your international air so we know which sectors we need to book for you.** Tickets are issued in Bhutan and will be sent to you by Myths and Mountains before your trip. Let us know whether you prefer Business Class or Economy on Druk Air. Economy Class will be booked for you unless otherwise specified, so please be sure to let us know.

NOTE: You will need to check in at the Druk Air counter **at least 2 hours** before your flight is scheduled to depart for Paro. You will need to bring your **passport**, **e-ticket** and **visa document** in order to board the plane to Bhutan.

Druk Air Weight Restrictions: Your bags are allowed to weigh 20 kilos, or 44 lbs, on Druk Air. You are allowed to check 2 bags and one carry-on. If you are flying on Business class, the weight allowance is 30 kg, or 66 lbs for checked bags.

Departure Tax from Paro: \$12 pp

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS IN BHUTAN:

At present, scheduling and flights are in flux and will be set as per your itinerary. If necessary, itineraries will be adjusted accordingly. Please contact us for more information pertaining to your particular program.

Time Zone: GMT/UTC + 6 (Bhutan time is 6 hours ahead of GMT and there is only one time zone throughout the country.)

Electricity: 230V, 50Hz. Three ROUND prongs is best. See the following website for pictures:
http://users.telenet.be/worldstandards/electricity.htm#plugs_c

Immunizations: Check directly with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a traveler's clinic or other medical authority. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/Travel/destinationList.aspx#P>

Tipping Guideline: Drivers - \$5-\$8 pp per day

Guides - \$10-\$20 pp per day

Additionally, for trekking trips:

Cook - \$4 pp per day

Porters and other trekking staff - \$3 pp per porter per day

Budget: You will need to analyze your spending habits and decide how much extra money to bring for alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, gratuities, souvenirs, and laundry. Note that wine and other western drinks are very expensive. For a ten-day trip, budget at least \$300 - \$500pp for additional expenses. A rule of thumb: take half the clothing and twice the money you thought you would need!

Packing Tips Specific to Bhutan:

- You will be offending people if you walk around in skimpy or tight fitting clothes. Dress neatly and modestly (covered arms - no tank tops or sleeveless shirts, no shorts or skirts above the knee, etc). Generally, Bhutanese women wear long dresses that cover the ankles.
- Shorts should be worn only on trek (with Bermuda shorts preferable). In Bhutan, since trails are not well traveled often, lightweight pants prevent a lot of scratches.
- The key to packing for Bhutan is to plan to *dress in layers*. Temperatures will vary with the time of day, and differing altitudes no matter what time of year you visit.
- If you wear contact lenses, bring a pair of glasses as well, as at high altitudes contact lenses can irritate the eyes.
- There are many dogs in settled areas. They sleep in the day and roam around at night. Bring earplugs if you think their barking might bother you.
- Plastic bags are banned in Bhutan, so you may want to pack a couple of your own for keeping certain items dry or separating muddy shoes, especially if trekking.

Food & Drink: Bhutanese food is very basic, so do not expect any gourmet dishes. Bhutanese eat very spicy food, but for foreigners, the spice is toned down and food tends to be bland. They have delicious red rice, and, particularly in springtime, delicious mushroom dishes. The national dish is chili and cheese!

Communications: Electricity can be sporadic. You may be able to check your email and make international telephone calls from most towns while touring Bhutan. While internet access is more likely in the western region, even in the far East, accessibility is increasing. International calls may be made and received at most accommodations. Guides carry satellite phones on treks, where groups are away from regular means of communication for extended periods of time.

Accommodations: There are three levels of hotels in Bhutan for which trip pricing is generally based: 1) Basic, 2) Moderate (requires supplements), 3) High End (such as the Amankora Chain). There are comfortable hotels, lodges and guesthouses at tourist destinations. Generally speaking, Western Bhutan has better accommodations, and Eastern Bhutan is more basic.

Laundry: You can do laundry in any hotel where you have a two-night stay. Do not give them anything requiring special care or that is very precious. Usually they wash clothes by rubbing them on rocks and drying them on the grass or lines outside.

Dialing Code: 975

Dialing procedures for making calls:

When you're in Bhutan:

- a) To call a local cellphone, dial 17 and then the 6-digit phone number.
- b) To call a geographic fixed local number, dial 2 for Thimphu, or 5 for Phuntsholing, and then the 6-digit phone number.
- c) To call the United States from Bhutan, dial 00 + 1 + the area code + 7 digit phone number for which you are trying to call.

When you're in the US:

- 011 is the US exit code and must be dialed first for all international calls made from the US or Canada.
- 975 is the Country Code for Bhutan
- area code - Bhutan has 1 digit area codes (Thimphu is 2, Phuntsholing is 5).
- The phone numbers in Bhutan are 6 digits
- US to Bhutan international dialing format is: 011 + 975 + ? + ??? ???

To Dial a Bhutan Cellular:

- Dialing format for calls to a cell phone: 011 + 975 + 17 ??? ???

For more information on making international phone calls: <http://www.howtocallabroad.com/>

Etiquette Tips for visiting Dzongs, Monasteries, Temples, and Festivals:

- Dress modestly!!! (See above notes about packing)
- Walk clockwise around Chortens (stupas) and Mani (prayer) walls.
- If you see a prayer flagpole on the ground waiting to be erected, do not step over it, as this is considered extremely disrespectful: walk around it instead.

Alms giving & Temple Donations:

- All temples have donation boxes. Although not required, it is nice to leave some small donation for the temple (20 - 100 NG, or more if you wish). If you ask a monk to light a candle or make a special blessing, more is required - check with your guide.
- The giving of alms to mendicants and holy men in the vicinity of markets and outside temples is an accepted practice. In exchange for your contribution of a small donation, a prayer will be intoned for you. On such occasions, ask your guide what is appropriate.

Gifts to children: Please do not bring pens, sweets, chewing gum, etc. for handing out to children who may gather around you. This encourages begging, is regarded as patronising and unhelpful, and is actively discouraged by the government, most families, teachers and school principals.

Photography: You will have tons of opportunities to take pictures on your trip as the natural scenery in Bhutan is superb, and you may wish to record the local people, their homes, shops, etc. Be respectful and always ask if possible. Also, note that photography in shrine rooms of dzongs, monasteries and religious institutions is generally not permitted - always check with your guide.

When attending festivals, Photography is usually permitted in public areas, such as courtyards and dance grounds, but not permitted inside the chapels of religious complexes. Take care not to intrude on the social space of others when taking photographs. NEVER stray onto the dance ground at a festival in search of the perfect shot - this is the height of bad manners and will definitely give offense to all Bhutanese who see you!

Shopping: Hand-woven textiles, carved masks, woven baskets, wooden bowls, handmade paper products, finely crafted metal objects, Thangka paintings and Bhutan's exquisite postage stamps are the items mostly purchased by travelers in Bhutan. Thimphu has the most extensive range of textiles, but for Yathra (hand-woven woolen textiles), the range is greatest in Bumthang. Thimphu's gold and silversmiths make to order, with items ready in seven days. **It is recommended to carry cash such as Euro, Pounds, US dollars, Japanese Yen in Bhutan. If you are buying from an individual craftsman, they are not likely to accept credit cards and in some stores, credit cards may not be accepted.**

NOTE: The buying and selling of antiques is strictly forbidden. Be cautious when considering the purchase of old and used items, especially of religious or cultural significance, as such items may not be exported without a clearance certificate. Seek the advice of your guide before committing to such purchases. It is best to buy more expensive items at reputable shops. You will need to keep the sales slip and a note about the piece. The guide can work with you on this when you are shopping, if there is a question.

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR SMOKERS: Smoking is banned in Bhutan, so if you are a smoker, bring your own and declare at the airport in Paro that they are for personal use. Also, be extremely careful about where you light up - check with your guide for advice on acceptable areas to smoke.

Dzongkha: The official Language: Bhutanese learn English in school which makes it very easy to get around. If you are interested in basic phrases, you can start with the phrases below.

Hello - kuzuangbo la
Goodbye - lazhimbe jon
Thank you - kadrache
Yes - ing/yo
No - me

How are you? - chogadebe yo?
What's your name? - cho meng gaci mo?
My name is... - nge meng ... ing
What is the time? - chutsho gademci mo?

"A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions."
-Oliver Wendell Holmes

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Bhutan

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The Raven Crown

2005, HARD COVER, 160 PAGES, \$60.00 Aris chronicles the rise of the Wangchuk dynasty in this beautifully illustrated history of the kingdom and its 20th-century monarchy, featuring 106 rare photographs. (Item no. BHU02)

Barbara Crossette

So Close to Heaven, The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas 1996, PAPER, 297 PAGES, \$16.00 Asia correspondent for the New York Times, Crossette portrays Bhutan and neighboring Ladakh and Sikkim as strongholds of Tantric Buddhism in an increasingly homogenized world. (Item no. NPL04)

Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse

What Makes You Not a Buddhist

2007, PAPER, 128 PAGES, \$15.95 Born in Bhutan in 1961, a Tibetan lama and filmmaker (Travellers and Magicians), Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche gives a decidedly modern take on dharma, happiness, suffering and enlightenment in this engaging primer. (Item no. TBT96)

Francoise Pommaret

Odyssey Guide Bhutan

2009, PAPER, 326 PAGES, \$23.95 A compact overview of the kingdom, its culture, history, flora and fauna by a resident scholar, enhanced by color photographs and maps. (Item no. BHU03)

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Bhutan, A Trekker's Guide

2008, FLEXI-BOUND, 332 PAGES, \$24.95 A compact, practical guide to 27 treks and walks throughout the mountain kingdom with color photographs and detailed sketch maps throughout. (Item no. BHU23)

Susan S. Bean, Diana K. Myers

From the Land of the Thunder Dragon

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Beneath Blossom Rain

2011, PAPER, 352 PAGES, \$19.95From his arrival at Paro International Airport to the last of 11 mountain passes, 24 days and 216 miles later, Grange writes with verve of his adventures on his trek across Bhutan. (Item no. BHU38)

Khyentse Norbu

Travellers and Magicians

2005, DVD, \$29.99The first feature shot on location in Bhutan, this film, directed by a respected lama, follows a young official on his odyssey across the country. Along the way he is joined by a mischievous monk, an elderly peddler and an old man with his daughter. (Item no. BHU22)

Sarah Harding

The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa

2003, PAPER, 200 PAGES, \$14.95A translation of the stories, meditations and discussions of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), an important figure in Bhutanese religious history. (Item no. BHU24)

Kunzang Choden

The Circle of Karma, A Novel

2005, PAPER, 328 PAGES, \$14.00The first novel by a Bhutanese woman, this lyrical coming-of-age story explores the rituals of daily life in Bhutan. When Tsomo's mother suddenly dies, the young girl must travel alone across Bhutan and into India. (Item no. BHU26)

Jamie Zeppa

Beyond the Sky and the Earth

1999, PAPER, 303 PAGES, \$16.00Zeppa's memoir of her time as teacher in a remote village shows her growing love and commitment to the people and culture. (Item no. BHU08)

Ken Haigh

Under the Holy Lake

2008, PAPER, 280 PAGES, \$29.95An English professor in Clarksburg, Ontario, Haigh describes the Buddhist temples, people, mountain trails and a simpler way of life in this love song to the mountain valley in Eastern Bhutan, where he was a young teacher on a two-year sojourn in the 1980s. (Item no. BHU37)

Linda Leaming

Married to Bhutan

2011, PAPER, 256 PAGES, \$14.95Enraptured by the customs, land and people of Bhutan, where she has lived and worked for ten years, Leaming writes with humor and candor about her often-bumpy cultural immersion, her romance with a Buddhist artist and her unexpected path to happiness. (Item no. BHU36)

Russ and Blyth Carpenter

The Blessings of Bhutan

2002, PAPER, 192 PAGES, \$26.99Head-over-heels in love with Bhutan, the Carpenters introduce their adopted home, its people,

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