

General Information... things you should know!

Departing For Bhutan - please do not attempt to have your luggage checked through to Bhutan. Luggage can only be checked to Bhutan by Drukair prior to your flight to Paro.

Bangkok Stopovers - we recommend a two night stopover is considered in Bangkok on your outbound journey. Most flights from Australia arrive into Bangkok very late at night and all Drukair flights to Paro depart very early in the morning and check-in can be as early as 03.50am. Should delays occur you will have at best an uncomfortable and inconvenient transit between flights. We recommend from personal experience, the new Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel at approx A\$260.00 per room per night (including 17.7% taxes). The hotel shuttle runs every 5 minutes and can be accessed by Arrival Gate 4. A taxi from the Novotel to Bangkok City takes 45 minutes and costs approx 240 Thai baht (A\$11.00) including two toll booth charges of 20 baht each, which your driver will ask you for in advance at each toll booth.

Bartering - the Bhutanese generally do not barter for products and a fixed price system mostly prevails. The only place to consider bartering is at the weekend markets in Thimphu where it is acceptable.

Bhutanese Cuisine - the Bhutanese diet is rich in meat and poultry, dairy, grain (particularly rice - red and white) and vegetables. Emadatse (chili pepper and cheese stew) is considered the national dish with many interpretations to this recipe throughout the country. Poultry and meat dishes, pork, beef and yak, are lavishly spiced with chilies, and it is common to see bright red peppers drying on rooftops in the sun. Salted butter tea, or suja, is served on all social occasions. Chang, a local beer, black mountain whiskey and arra, a spirit distilled from various grains, are also common and widely favoured. Doma or betel nut is offered as a customary gesture of greeting.

Currency & Credit Cards - the Bhutanese currency is the Ngultrum and is the same value as the Indian Rupee. Both can be used in Bhutan. Most foreign visitors take in US\$ and this is widely accepted. Some useful tips are

- * Consider a budget of US\$45-60 per person per day. This will cover tips, drinks & most handicraft purchases along the way.
- * If taking US\$ please ensure you have plenty of US\$1 and US\$5 notes for convenience.
- * If taking in Indian Rupees do NOT carry 500 or 1000 rupee notes as they are rarely accepted.
- * Stick with 10 and 100 rupee notes where possible.
- * No ATM machines are available in Bhutan.
- * If bringing travellers cheques please ensure these are US\$ cheques

Credit cards are becoming more frequently accepted in the larger souvenir shops. When using your credit card a surcharge of up to 7% applies so beware! The Government Handicraft Centre in Thimphu accepts Visa, MasterCard and Amex as do the Jumolhari Hotel Thimphu, Zhiwa Ling Resort Paro and the five Amankora Lodges.

Drink Prices - drink prices in Bhutan at BTCL Hotels (approximate costs in Australian Dollars).

- * Large bottle of mineral water..... AU\$1.00
- * Local Red Panda Beer (Large)..... AU\$3.70
- * Imported Indian Beer (Medium)..... AU\$4.00
- * Bottle of Fiddleback Australian Wine.. AU\$56.00

Duty Free Allowance - the following allowances are per person:

- * 1 litre bottle of spirits
 - * 250mls of perfume
 - * 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250grams tobacco
- (a duty will apply to bringing cigarettes, and tobacco products into Bhutan of up to 200%)
- * Currency – no restriction
 - * Gifts/Souvenirs – no restriction

Please note the exportation of genuine antiquities, religious objects, and manuscripts are strictly forbidden.

Dogs - there are plenty of them. Whilst a sterilization program has been commenced by the Government it is not expected to have a major impact for some years to come. They are generally well behaved however can be noisy at night...especially in Thimphu. You might consider carrying ear plugs if you are especially sensitive to noise at night.

Dress for Bhutan - the official word is – Dress should not be too formal - plain, simple and inoffensive clothing is expected when visiting Dzongs and Monasteries. Women must have their legs covered when entering Dzongs or Monasteries and hats & caps should NOT be worn on such visits. Remember to pack warmer clothing for the evenings. Take just 2 pairs of footwear. A pair of stout walking shoes or boots will see you right for day use and a more comfortable pair of shoes for about the hotels in the evenings. Please ensure your walking shoes/boots are well worn in! What to take with you.

- * Light rain jacket any time of year
- * Warm clothes and thermals for winter and higher altitude trekking.
- * Essential medications and a small emergency medical kit.
- * A good flashlight.
- * Day pack, binoculars and camera.
- * Sleeping bag and underlay if trekking.

Electricity - Bhutan operates on a 230 volts, 50 cycles AC system, which is generally reliable. The standard socket is the Indian style round pin socket, however these come in a variety of sizes and there's no assurance the plug you have on your appliance, or converter, will fit the socket in your hotel. Most European round -pin plugs work, albeit loosely in the socket. Take an adapter with you and if you are still having problems there are plenty of electrical shops in Thimphu who can assist with a local version.

Gifts - the Bhutanese are beginning to frown on gifts for local people and children, as they are believed to encourage begging which the Bhutanese Government is determined to avoid at all cost. Coloured pencils and pens are always welcomed, however best to give them to teachers or adults to distribute rather than to the children themselves. Stick pins/fluffy koalas are a novelty but of little practical value so best left at home. Duty Free alcohol/cigarettes are always welcomed by your tour operators and long Argyle socks are an excellent gift for guides/drivers etc. This is part of their national dress!

Hotels - your hotel will be a traditional Bhutanese style property generally of 3 star standard, featuring restaurants with western styled Bhutanese fare. These hotels, mostly owned by Bhutan Tourism Corporation Limited are generally consistent in standard and facilities. Hotel rooms are modest and beds can be hard however all do feature private bathrooms. You are not generally able to request specific hotels in advance as these are allocated closer to your arrival time by BTCL on the basis of visitor numbers in the nation at that time.

Opening Times for Major Institutions - subject to change at short notice! Note most are closed on Mondays and National Holidays.

- * **National Museum - Paro:** Tue-Sat 9.00am to 4.00pm; Sundays 11.00am to 4.00pm.
Closed - Mon & National Holidays.
- * **School of Arts & Crafts – Thimphu:** Mon-Fri 2.00pm to 4.00pm; Saturdays 9.00am to 12noon.
Closed - Sun, National & Winter Holidays.
- * **The National Library – Thimphu:** Mon-Fri 9.00am to 4.00pm summer. Closes 4pm in winter.
Closed - Sat, Sun & National Holidays.
- * **National Textile Museum – Thimphu:** Tue-Fri 9.00am to 4.00pm; Sat 1.00pm to 4.00pm; Sun 10.00am to 3.00pm.
Closed - Mon & National Holidays.
- * **Institute of Traditional Medicine – Thimphu:** Mon-Fri 9.00am to 5.00pm summer. Closes 4.00pm winter.
Closed - Sat & Sun and all Public Holidays. Note: Visitors only permitted to the museum and library.
- * **Punakha Dzong:** Closed for visits in winter when the Monk Body is in residence.
- * **Tashichodzong – Thimphu:** Open for visits only in winter after 4pm, when the Monk Body is in Punakha.

Special Notes on Cultural Adherence - most of the Dzongs and Lhakangs are not open for visits by tourists. This is to ensure monastic life can continue unhindered and also for environmental reasons. The Bhutanese appreciate your understanding. Be very careful when purchasing antiquities as souvenirs. Many are not permitted to be removed from Bhutan and will be confiscated without a letter of certification.

You Must Book Well In Advance - entry to Bhutan is largely controlled by the relatively small number of guides, drivers, cars and hotel rooms and of course airline seats on Drukair. To ensure you can obtain space on Drukair flights, and also obtain pre-approval for your entry visa in time for your departure, it is strongly recommended you make your travel arrangements for Bhutan at least 3 months in

advance. For busy periods, such as September to November and March to May, at least 6 months advance booking is required.

Very Important Advice Re Hotels & Itinerary Changes in Bhutan.

Bhutan has a limited tourism infra-structure, which is constantly evolving, and there are occasionally challenges in providing accommodation to all visitors offered visa's at one time.

The current national system used for all tourist visitors is based on allocating hotel rooms approximately 10 days prior to their arrival in the Kingdom. During the peak months of March-May and September-November demand can sometimes necessitate a late minor change of your prearranged itinerary and/or a change of scheduled hotel in order to accommodate you satisfactorily.

Our experience in the past suggests this has rarely caused any major inconvenience and certainly has not in any way undermined the rich and rewarding experience offered by this wonderful destination. However we kindly request you factor this possibility in to your planning when considering a visit to Bhutan.

Mandatory Travel Package Structure - all tourists MUST travel on pre-planned, pre-paid, guided package arrangements. You do NOT have to travel as part of a group and can enjoy flexibility to wander about Bhutan's towns and countryside with a reasonable degree of freedom. However it is not possible to be fully independent and you must always travel with your guide and driver between towns and villages and stay in your pre-booked hotel accommodation. The Bhutanese are extremely hospitable and your guide will be a valuable asset and add to the enjoyment of your stay immensely.

Seasons - low season is January, June and July and high season applies the rest of the year.

Smoking - it is forbidden to sell or purchase cigarettes or tobacco products in Bhutan. It is however NOT forbidden to smoke in appropriate areas and you may carry a small supply for personal use.

Speaking Dzongkha - here are a few basic phrases to help you along the way. Your guide, along with younger Bhutanese will speak very good English.

Kuzuzangpo La	Respected Greetings (use this when meeting new people)
Tashi Delek	May all good things come to you (use this as a farewell)
Kardenche La	Thank you
Monastery	Goempa
Temple	Lhakang
Toilet	Chapsa
Water	Chuu
Whiskey	Arra
Beer	Bang Chhang
Yes	Ing
No	Me

Tipping - suggested tipping fees are at your discretion.

From personal experience and the feedback of other clients we suggest you consider tipping as follows.

- 1-2 person travelling: US\$8 pp per day for your guide and US\$5 pp per day for your driver.
- 3-8 persons travelling: US\$5 pp per day for your guide and US\$3 pp per day for your driver.
- 8-16 persons travelling US\$4 pp per day for your guide and US\$3 pp per day for your driver.

When trekking, you will also need to tip your cook and horsemen. Your guide will assist you in the amounts required. It is also customary to tip your guide extra when trekking. It is generally accepted that children do not need to be included in the tipping formula!

Travel Packages and Costs - the Royal Government of Bhutan has a fixed tariff system for visitors. This is based on a minimum set nightly fee per person. Additionally all tourists pay a Tourism Development Fee and a Visa Fee and surcharges apply if travelling as a party of less than 3 persons and for those requiring single rooms. Travel Packages Include:

General Information

- * Your personal guide & driver with car/4WD or minibus depending on party size.
- * All touring & sightseeing throughout your stay in Bhutan.
- * Hotel accommodation with private bathrooms & all meals.
- * When trekking tented campsites replace hotels.
- * When trekking the services of additional support crew and ponies are included.
- * Visa fees, Paro Airport taxes, Government Levies and taxes.

To refer to the 'Costs and Conditions' please enter [Here](#)

Trekking - you can trek anytime of the year and trekking itineraries range from 3 day to 30 day walks with varying degrees of difficulty. Guides, ponies and a cook support trekking groups. Campsites are set up in advance and the trekkers enjoy the magnificent scenery and culture with only a daypack to carry. Binoculars, camera, sunscreen, insect repellent (in summer), sunglasses, a good pair of walking boots and warm clothing are essential. Winter trekking is kept to the lower altitudes in the valleys. NOTE: Many treks take you to high altitudes and the air is thin. Altitude sickness is common and should be taken into account when planning your itinerary. You must provide your own sleeping bag on all treks. [Trekking in Bhutan](#)

Altitude Sickness - It is advisable to avoid any trekking or climbing until at least day 3 unless you are at least moderately fit and do not suffer from any lung related condition such as asthma. As a precaution we suggest that you carry a small amount of Diamox as the Bhutan trekking crews rarely carry such medication. If you suffer from altitude sickness please descend as quickly as possible and drink plenty of fluids. Diamox (Acetazolamide) maybe combined with Ibuprofen or Paracetamol after treatment symptoms may last for a few days.

Visa - A visa to enter Bhutan will be prearranged on your behalf. When entering Bhutan through the land border of Phuentsholing two passport sized photos are required. Whilst it is not generally requested by authorities on arrival at Paro Airport. It is still recommended that you carry two passport sized photos with you. [Visa application form](#)

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