

The Kingdom of Bhutan

is a landlocked South Asian nation situated between India and Tibet. The entire country is mountainous except for an 8-10 mile (13-16 km) wide strip of subtropical plains in the extreme south which is intersected by valleys known as the Duars. The elevation gain from the subtropical plains to the glacier-covered Himalayan heights exceeds 23,000 feet (7,000 m). Its traditional economy is based on forestry, animal husbandry and subsistence agriculture however these account for less than 50% of a GDP now that Bhutan has become an exporter of hydroelectricity. Cash crops, tourism, and development aid (the latter mostly from India) are also significant. An extensive census done in April, 2006 resulted in a population figure of 672,425. Thimphu is the capital and largest city.

Bhutan is one of the most isolated nations in the world; foreign influences and tourism are heavily regulated by the government to preserve its traditional Tibetan Buddhist culture. Most Bhutanese follow either the Drukpa Kagyu or the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism. The official language is Dzongkha. Bhutan is often described as the last surviving refuge of traditional Himalayan Buddhist culture.



Young novice monks enjoying the afternoon sun, in the Paro dzong

By the time we had left Bhutan, we had realized how amazing and unique this tour company is. They are well educated, fluent English speakers that are willing to go to any length to make a trip to Bhutan amazing. When the Lonely Planet says that Buddhist temples are off-limits and most guiding companies tell you that you can't enter them, Keys to Bhutan goes to the trouble of getting the permits and permission necessary to let tourists into the temples.

- Brice King
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Shrouded for centuries in the misty serenity of the great Himalayas, the Land of the Thunder Dragon, or Bhutan, as now known to the rest of the world, developed its own distinct civilization.

This deeply spiritual land is home to a unique identity, derived essentially from a fertile religious and cultural heritage. Bhutan brims with myth and legend. As a befitting testimony, a great Buddhist heritage of over 2000 monasteries and 10,000 monuments dot its peaceful open space and regal mountains. An ambience of near sacred tranquility permeates the land, fostering an environment of spiritual affluence that has shaped the foundation of that rarity that we know as Bhutanese life.

The Bhutanese have deliberately and zealously safeguarded and preserved their rich culture and traditions, its ancient way of life, in all its aspects. And it is perhaps one of the world's last strongholds of unspoiled wilderness. It is a part of the earth that represents a fabled realm.

Bhutan is a land where the past and the contemporary co-exist in harmony, a recipe that makes a journey undeniably amazing. A trip through Bhutan, in many ways, is still a journey into the past. In this small tract of land, one of the most rugged terrains in the world frames one of the world's richest vegetations.

It is a land of about half a million people who believe that Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product. Bhutan is a country with a different face. And a different story to tell.

Bhutan

*the kingdom
of happiness*



KEYS TO BHUTAN

Adventure in the Last Buddhist Kingdom

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adventure in the last buddhist kingdom



Layap girls admiring one of our guests

Bhutan is one of the most beautiful places on earth, with some of the world's grandest mountains and the most breath-taking landscapes. Over the years, we have experimented and perfected unique itineraries to enhance your experience. Itineraries that offer insights into Bhutan and what Bhutan means to the outside world; a chance to see our world in a whole new way.

Cultural Tours

Bhutan is a rich mosaic of different cultures, traditions, life styles, ethnic groups, languages and belief systems. It is astounding that a country with a population of just over half a million speaks as many as nineteen different dialects and a few major languages. Diverse as it may seem, yet the Bhutanese socio-culture fabric is well interlaced and harmonized mainly due to the common thread of simple Buddhist values that the people share.

Our cultural tours are the easiest way to get a taste of Bhutan. With comfortable nights in hotels and luxury busses or cars during the day, we will give you a tour of all the major towns. Each town has a Dzong dating back from the 1600s, and many old temples and monasteries, architectural marvels in their own rights. Where ever possible we can organize cultural shows for you to heighten your experience.

Treks

Trekking in Bhutan is unlike anywhere else in the Himalayas. The walks are long and arduous but they are complemented by the pristine atmosphere and views that defy description. Only a handful of tourists trek each year; trails are not as developed as they are in other countries. However what Bhutan may lack in infrastructural development, it makes up for in superb support facilities for trekkers. All our treks are accompanied by trained guides and an excellent support staff. All gear is carried by horses and yaks; you will only have to carry a daypack with your camera and extra films.

We have tried to think of many ways to make our trek as comfortable as possible. Our support crew will walk ahead and set up the camp before you arrive. A warm cup of tea waiting in the dining tent is the most welcome treat after ten hours hiking up and down mountains, sometimes as high as 18,000 feet.

Festivals

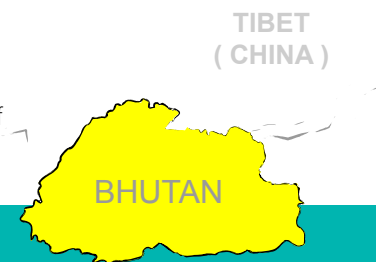
Religious festivals are perfect occasions to glimpse what might be termed Bhutanese culture. Celebrated throughout the country, they occur in a host of differing forms, depending upon the scale, the nature of the ceremonies performed or the particular deity being revered. The best known are the Tsechus, festivals which honor Guru Rimpochey and celebrate one of his remarkable actions, and the most popular of these take place annually in or around the great Dzongs, attracting both tourists and large numbers from the surrounding districts.

Lasting several days, the central focuses are the series of prayers and religion inspired dances. These dances, made especially striking by the spectacular costumes of the dancers - bright silks and rich brocade, ornate hats or extraordinary masks - may either depict morality tales, invoke protection from demonic spirits or proclaim Buddhist victories and the glory of remarkable saints.

Mountain Biking

Bhutan is known for its essentially undisturbed ecology and traditional ways of life. The serene atmosphere is a perfect setting for such gentle and understated exploration. Our biking tours will bring you to appreciate the country's natural beauty and cultural wealth. Our trips provide a sense of being transported back in history.

Bhutan's mountainous terrain offers a fascinating adventure for mountain biking enthusiasts. The route along Bhutan's west-east highway (approx.600 km) is an exciting route with challenges of battling a new pass over 3000 meters everyday. The highways wind up and down with drops of thousands of feet, keeping one too high on adrenaline to feel the slightest pinch of monotony.



Travel by Air

Today, Bhutan's national air carrier, Druk Air, operates several flights per week from Bangkok, Delhi, Kolkata And Kathmandu to Paro. The modern Airbus A-319 jets carry passengers through one of the most spectacular flight paths in the world.

Travel by Land

The town of Phuentsholing in south-western Bhutan is currently the only land border access open for international tourists. Phuentsholing lies approximately 170 km east of the Indian airport town Bagdogra, close to Darjeeling.

Capital: **Thimphu**
Location: **27°28'N 89°38'E**
Government: **Monarchy**
Area: **47,000 km²**
Population: **672,425(2005)**
Population density: **46/km²**
Time zone: **UTC+6:00**