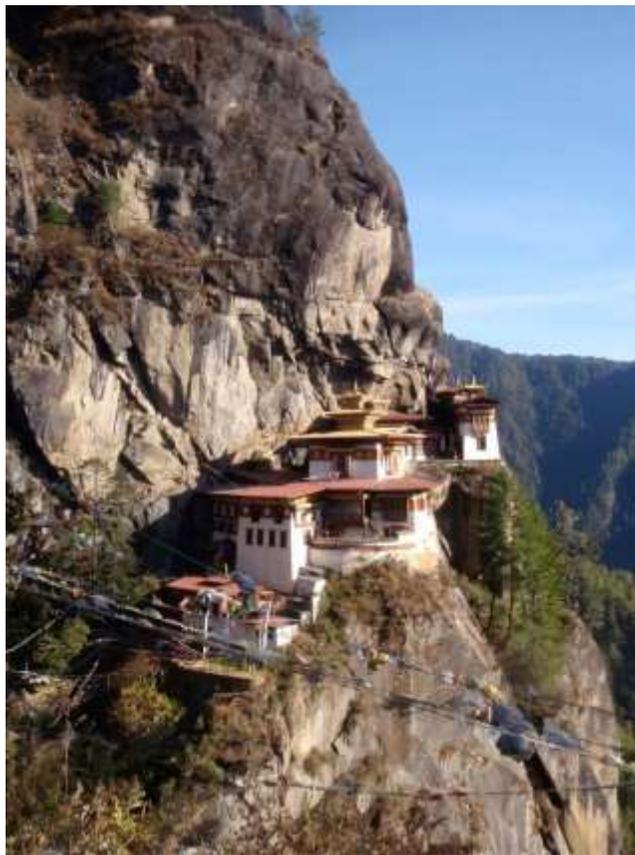




Mountains, Rivers and Dzongs Bhutan



"The world has few secrets left, but Bhutan is one of them. Isolated from the outside for three centuries, this forbidden Kingdom in the Himalayas provides the setting for a bewitching adventure amongst widely varying peoples and terrain"

Katie Hickman

Trip Summary

Our "Mountains, Rivers and Dzongs" Bhutan adventure travel trip offers an in-depth journey into different aspects of Bhutanese culture, history, and scenery. Our Bhutan travel itinerary has been designed with our local Bhutanese partners to combine classic Himalayan trekking, visits to ancient monasteries and fortresses (Dzongs) and whitewater rafting on two different rivers in this Himalayan mountain kingdom.

The 3 day Bhutan trek explores the snow-capped Eastern Himalayan Mountains with visits to a high-altitude Bhutan monastery and alpine lakes. The two exciting rivers offer Class II to IV whitewater rafting with a float past the spectacular Punakha Dechenphodrang Dzong. Your adventure is rounded out with mountain biking along ancient paths, sightseeing and being immersed in the colorful Bhutan Culture.

Itinerary Snapshot

Day 1	Arrive in Paro (Bhutan) from Bangkok and check into the hotel. Sightsee around the Paro Valley. Night at the Tenzinling Resort Paro. (B,L,D)
Day 2	Sightseeing around Thimphu. Optional: big day hike to Phajoding Monastery perched 4000 ft above the Thimpu Valley. The Phajoding monastery site was founded in the 13 th century by Phajo Drugom Zhigpo (1184-1251), the Tibetan lama who spread the Drukpa Kagyu teachings of Buddhism in Bhutan and known as the 'current of compassion'. It is one of the most sacred meditational sites in Bhutan. This is a beautiful but long hike. There are shorter options. Night at hotel in Thimphu. (Distance 4-5km and walking is 4 hrs) (B,L,D)
Day 3	Sinchula Trek Duration: 2 Night and 3 Days Trek. The Sinchula route gives a great opportunity to experience the old trade route between Thimphu and Punakha. The trail was heavily used 40 years before the motor road was built. We drive from Thimphu to Galapang (fifty minutes) and onto Kabisa village, north east of Thimphu, where the trek begins. The trail follows farm roads for some time before you start to climb through the Blue Pine forest. The vegetation changes often as does the views of the Himalayas. Altitude gain 400m, Altitude loss 0, Distance 6 km. (B,L,D)
Day 4	Galapang to Dungshing Pang Climb from camp site to Sinchula pass (3530m). The pass is marked with a small Stupa and prayer flags. The trail then becomes very narrow in a steep-walled canyon and drops all the way to Galapang camp; open pasture land where farmers from Kabisa bring their cattle. Altitude gain 556m, Altitude loss 1530m. Distance 11km. (B,L,D)
Day 5	Dubgshing Pang to Punakha The trail continues to drop down to a beautiful suspension bridge towards Chorten Ningpo Lhakhang. This is an old temple founded in 15th century by Lama Drukpa Kinley and there are currently 15 monks residing in the temple. After a short visit to the temple, its an hour walk to the main road where our bus will be waiting with welcoming refreshments and a short drive to the hotel. Located at a height of 4265 ft., Punakha valley, one of Bhutan's most scenic destinations, is the perfect place to awaken the nature lover in you. Take in the splendid views of the Himalayas, listen to the sounds of the Mo Chhu and Po Chhu rivers that cut through the valley, or simply soak up the serene beauty of this gorgeous valley. Altitude gain 0, Altitude loss 720m, Distance 9 km. Night at Hotel in Punakha. (B,L,D)

Day 6	Hike or bike option to the put-in for the upper Po Chhu. The first half of this run is action-packed class 3 and 4 whitewater, and the lower parts become a nice scenic float. We raft past the Punakha Dzong and picnic Lunch at the take-out of the lower Pho Chhu. In the late afternoon, we will visit the Punakha Dzong. Night at lodge. (B,L,D)
Day 7	Drive over Pele La Pass with a lunch stop at Bhutan's largest Stupa. Then it's on to the town of Trongsa. Mountain Bikes will be there for those who want to bike portions of the way. (Pele La Pass is 10,500ft and driving distance from Punakha to Trongsa is 142 km and driving time will be 5-6 hrs) (B,L,D)
Day 8	Paddle a stunning canyon on the lower Mangde Chhu named Ema Datzhi, after the Bhutanese national dish. This canyon is legitimate class 4 whitewater! Enjoy and evening cultural show with culture/mask dance in the Palace courtyard. Night at camp. (B,L,D)
Day 9	Drive/Bike to Bumthang about 4 hrs over the Yotung La Pass and the Chumey Valley. Evening sight-seeing around Bumthang. Bumthang region is known for its spectacular mountain landscapes, ancient temples and sacred monuments, and has a strong tradition of woodcarving and weavings. Night at a local lodge. (Yotung La pass is 11,000ft and distance is 136km) (B,L,D)
Day 10	Sight-seeing (bike) around Bumthang (or day hike to Pedsiling Gonpa if you prefer to hike) or Raft/Kayak part of the Chamkhar Chhu in Bumthang. Night at local lodge in Bumthang. (B,L,D)
Day 11	Catch the early morning flight from Bumthang to Paro (Weather permitting, it's a stunning 25 minute flight as opposed to a very long drive back). Spend the rest of the day sightseeing around Paro. Night at hotel in Paro. (B,L,D)
Day 12	Hike to Taktsang Lhakhang, the Tiger's Nest Monastery which is a small collection of buildings precariously perched on a cliff 900 meters off of the ground. It's stunning in its beauty and location. It was constructed in 1692, around the cave where Guru Rinpoche first meditated, the event that introduced Buddhism into Bhutan. There is a legend that Guru Rinpoche was carried from Tibet to this location on the back of a tigress, thus giving it the name "Tiger's Nest." Evening at leisure to wander around Paro town. Farewell dinner. Night at hotel. (Hike 4 hrs roundtrip, 7km) (B,L,D)
Day 13	Depart for airport and flight out of Bhutan. (B)

***Note: depending on availability we may choose a different hotel but of similar type and equal quality.**

Bhutan Contact Information

Contact of Xplore Bhutan, your tour operator while in Bhutan:

Ugyen Dorji (YOUGS)

Xplore Bhutan

Post Box #1376

Thimphu - Kingdom of Bhutan

Phone: +975-17139999

udorji@gmail.com

Visas and Passports

U.S. citizens are required to have a passport that is valid for 6 months after your travel dates begin.

Bio Bio Expeditions will be sending you a copy of your e-tickets out of Bangkok and a copy of your Visas a few weeks prior to departure. Be sure to arrive at least two hours early to the Druk Air desk and check-in with your Passport, Visa and e-ticket information.

Flights and Airports

You are responsible for booking all international flights to Bangkok. We will arrange for the flight from Bangkok to Paro. One travel agent we often use to book our international flights is:

Sandesh
Himalayan Travels
1-800-223-1813

Flying In...

You will fly into Bangkok and fly to Paro early on Day 1 of your trip. We recommend arriving in Bangkok a day or two early in order to ensure that you are in Bangkok to catch the flight to Paro. If you would like to stay at the airport, [Novotel](#) is a very convenient hotel. This is the recommended place to stay the night before your flight to Paro. Some flights with Thai Airways include a voucher to stay at this hotel, so make sure to ask if it is included.

Flying Out...

We will provide the flight from Paro to Bangkok. We recommend staying the night in Bangkok that night and flying out the next day or staying on a few extra days to see the sights of Bangkok.

Bhutan time is GMT +6 hours (+14 hrs PST)

Packing List

Baggage Allowance and Suggested Gear

Taking the proper gear on an adventure travel trip is an art form; learn to take only what you need without leaving anything behind. The weather is normally characterized by sunny days and cool nights. The temperature will be largely dictated by our altitude, which will vary from 1,500 ft to 8,000 ft (higher when we go over the passes). Plan to dress in layers. This set-up will prepare you for the worst, although we expect the best.

Please see what restrictions your airline imposes, as the rules and allowances are constantly changing. The baggage allowance on your Druk Air Flight is 44 pounds per person for your checked luggage, along with a carry-on item such as a purse, camera, jacket or book. Other items such as a small overnight bag will be subject to extra baggage fees.

Any extra gear that you do not wish to take on the expedition should be left at our hotel. You don't have to bring everything with you on the trek, we can arrange to have gear left behind meet you after the trek. Do

remember to bring your passport with you on the whole trip.

Bhutan is probably the safest country in the world to travel, but still be aware of where your gear is at all times. Don't leave any gear lying around on the trip. It's an open invitation for theft.

In Camp

For the nights in camp in Punakha (the rest of the time we will be in hotels or guest-houses). While camping you will sleep in nice tents, all camp set-up will be taken care of for you. Xplore Bhutan will provide tents and sleeping pads. Thermarest are a nice addition to bring.

- A nice down sleeping bag (preferably for sub-zero temperatures). You never know how cold it gets sometimes up in the mountains. We can provide these for you, but most prefer their own bags – let us know what you decide
- Sleeping pads are provided but some clients prefer their own. Bring one if you think it's required

For The Trek

- The most you will need for hiking is a daypack with just your essentials for that day (water, camera, jacket). The rest of your stuff will be packed and carried by pack ponies/porters
- A well broken in pair of boots or trail shoes is recommended for the treks and hikes

Rafting

We supply all the necessary gear. All you need is bathing suits / river shorts and good footwear.

Packing

- Pack in a soft duffel, not a suitcase, Bio Bio Expeditions sells for \$100.00 the perfect duffel bag for adventure travel like this particular trip. Email info@bbxrafting.com to order your bag.
- Separate your clothing into plastic bags or stuff bags (optional suggestion)
- Minimize the amount of rubbish you will need to carry out by taking minimal packaging and containers.
- Avoid cotton, especially T-shirts on the trekking days. Cotton can become wet from sweating during the day and lose their insulating ability. Quick drying nylon, lightweight capilene, silk or wool are all options. Layering is the key to comfort and warmth. Merino wool from Patagonia is also a nice option - It keeps you warm and even after days of hiking, does not have any bad odor like other synthetics.
- Carry everything you need for the day in your daypack.

Essentials For Your Day Pack

- Rain jacket (Not really necessary for November/December, but with the world weather going crazy these days, who knows)
- Warm layer (fleece, jacket, etc)
- Hat (for sun protection and warmth)
- Sunscreen
- Lip balm

- Camera and film
- Soap/anti-bacterial hand gel
- Sunglasses
- Water bottle

Clothing

- Socks
- Shorts
- Long pants
- Short sleeve shirts
- Long sleeve shirt
- Underwear
- Sun hat
- Warm hat
- Medium weight hiking boots
- Sneakers or camp shoes
- Warm pants
- Down or heavy fleece jacket
- Medium weight fleece or wool sweater
- Polypro top (extra)
- Rain jacket or mountain parka
- Gloves

Other Essentials

- Daypack
- Book
- Music
- Lip balm
- Sunscreen
- Personal medical kit
- Anti-inflammatory/pain-reliever
- Toiletries kit
- Blister kit/moleskin.
- Camera and film
- Sunglasses
- Anti-bacterial hand gel

Camping Gear

- Flashlight (or headlamp)
- Batteries
- Thermarest - not needed but recommended
- Towel or Sarong for changing

*Remember when packing your carry-on bag to bring any medications needed as well as any toothpaste or lotions in a plastic zip loc bag for security. You may want to bring a toothbrush on your overnight flight as well as a change of clothing.

Cameras

Bring plenty of digital storage, camera cleaning equipment and spare batteries. While traveling and trekking you should carry your camera equipment in your daypack.



Alcohol and Treats

It is a good idea to stock up on duty free coming into the country. If anyone wants to take additional alcohol we can pack it. It's also a good idea to bring along some of your favorite energy bars for extra snacks along the way. Basically, if you need any specialty items, we suggest you get them before you go.

Dress Code

While you are in the mountains or monasteries it is best to remember the conservative ways of the rural people and make sure you dress and act with cultural respect. People in Bhutan are very modest people with a strong sense of decency and can be easily offended by skimpily clad foreigners. Dress discreetly in line with local custom and you will be more readily respected and accepted by local people.

Women should wear a blouse and long skirt or long pants in public. It is always handy to have a Sarong on a trip. This should be kept with your day-pack while trekking. Shorts and a top or bathing costume are fine on rivers. Never is topless or nude sun bathing acceptable in Bhutan!

Money Matters

Currency

Bhutan's currency is the Ngultrum (Nu.) It is at par with the Indian rupee which is accepted as legal tender in the country. Note: INR (Indian Rupees) denominations of 500 and 1000 are not accepted in Bhutan.

On stops and occasionally in villages, you may wish to buy a cold coke or a treat. If you plan on doing some retail therapy in Bhutan, there are a lot of markets with plenty of opportunities to purchase Bhutanese handicrafts, which make great souvenirs. Remember that credit cards are not possible to use in Bhutan in most places so think in advance how much money you'll need and bring it in cash.

ATMs

ATMs are located within all main towns throughout Bhutan, where money can be withdrawn using a Visa or MasterCard. Be aware of counterfeit currency and avoid being followed to and from an ATM machine! Go in pairs!

Credit Cards

Credit cards are not possible to use in Bhutan in most places, so think in advance how much money you will need and bring it in cash.

Personal Checks

Personal checks are not accepted in shops or at your hotels. It's a good idea, however, to bring a few for possible emergencies.

Travelers Cheques

Travel checks are less desirable as fewer and fewer places will change them, and you may end up in long bank lines. You will need to show your passport to cash your checks at the bank.

Tipping

Tipping is, of course, entirely voluntary and how much you give depends on how you feel about the service you have received. Typically, you should designate 10-15% of the land cost of the trip for tips. For example, a \$4000 trip would mean \$400 in tips.

Other smaller tips might be for airport luggage carriers, hotel staff and drivers. This is where \$1 bills or single soles come in handy. The norm at restaurants is approximately 5-15%.

Travel Practicalities

Trip Insurance

Bio Bio Expeditions recommends that you purchase a travel protection plan to help protect you and your travel investment against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, contact Travelex Insurance Services at 800-228-9792 and reference location number 05-8655. Travelex Insurance Services, Inc CA Agency License #0D10209. Travel Insurance is underwritten by, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance Company, NAIC #22276. 55Y.

Immunizations

Although there are no immunizations required to travel to Bhutan, it is usually recommended that typhoid and diphtheria-tetanus protection be current. Hepatitis A, taken just before departure, is also recommended. In general, we advise that you consult your physician regarding recommended immunizations and other health precautions. Bio Bio Expeditions does not take responsibility for which medications or inoculations you and your physician deem necessary for your safe participation on the expedition in Bhutan.

For further information, call the CDC's International Traveler's Hotline:

Phone: 1-888-232-4636

Online: www.cdc.gov

Water

Although it requires a little extra caution when drinking fluids in Bhutan, it is essential to stay well hydrated. We advise that you not drink any of the tap water in Bhutan; this includes no ice in your drink. Bottled water is fine to drink and can be ordered at most restaurants and found in local grocery stores. When ordering sodas, it is best to request them without ice, as the ice is usually made from tap water. Additionally, be sure to brush your teeth with bottled water.

Food

The major precaution regarding food pertains to raw, unpeeled fruits and vegetables (including lettuce) - avoid them unless you are dining in a high-end restaurant! If you can't peel it, don't eat it as it has probably been washed in tap water, or not washed at all, and that can make you sick. The high altitude also affects one's digestive system so it is recommended to eat in moderation and avoid rich, thick foods (such as mayonnaise). However, don't be afraid to try new foods and dishes - just be cautious. We want you to experience the many new flavors and local cuisine, but there are some things to consider when making food choices, especially where you are eating. The more high-end restaurants are fairly safe bets for trying new things. Street food should generally be avoided. This brings us to our next topic...

Digestive Worries

Traveling to Bhutan is going to have a notable impact on your body. Despite the many precautions we all take to stay healthy, occasionally one may experience diarrhea. The major problem associated with diarrhea is fluid loss leading to severe dehydration, so it is important to maintain plentiful fluid intake. Avoid milk and avoid caffeine, as it will only further dehydrate you. The best drinks are weak tea, mineral water, and caffeine-free soft drinks. Ideally it is best to let diarrhea run its course, however you may want to bring over-the-counter diarrhea medication to minimize your potential discomfort. The bottom line (no pun intended) is to drink plenty of fluids and get lots of rest! Lastly, we encourage that you, and all our staff, practice impeccable hand hygiene – you can't wash your hands enough! Sanitizer gels are great when hand washing with soap and water is not available.

Prescriptions

If you currently take prescription medications, be sure to have a plentiful supply and also the doctor's written prescription in case you need a refill. It is best to carry medications in your carry-on bag in case of lost luggage. Also, if you wear prescription glasses or contacts, we advise that you bring along a spare set.

Voltage

In Bhutan, most of the hotels have 3 pin plugs. The voltage is 220 - 240V, Primary Socket type (3 pins). If you are carrying 110-120V electronics, you will need to bring a plug adapter and converter.

Safety Concerns

There is relatively little crime in Bhutan. Petty crime, such as pick-pocketing and purse snatching, is occasionally reported. Reasonable precautions should be taken when visiting the town and, in particular, when going out at night.

When traveling in cities, always keep your wits about you and be aware of your surroundings. When with other people, watch out for each other. Large crowds are prime locations for pick-pocketing to occur. Keep your money in a money belt or hidden pouch around your neck and under your shirt. When purchasing items, do not pull out lots of money. **We advise that you leave all valuable jewelry, including watches, at home.** Thieves often work in pairs or groups - one tries to distract you (e.g.: by squirting food or paint on your clothing) and in the ensuing confusion, another one makes off with your belongings.

Jet Lag Precautions

When you cross several time zones to reach your destination, you often lose many hours of regular sleep. On arrival, your body then must suddenly adjust to new sleeping and eating patterns. The result is jet lag. Its symptoms are fatigue – often compounded by insomnia and restlessness – irritability, and vague disorientation. You cannot totally avoid jet lag but you can minimize it. Here's how:

- Start your trip well rested. Try to begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave
- Switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane. Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule
- Try to sleep on overnight flights
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before and during your flight
- Drink plenty of water and or fruit juice while flying. You should buy a large bottle of water at a kiosk right before boarding – once you have cleared inside security and are “inside”
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap, unless you didn't sleep at all on the plane
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner

Altitude Sickness

The altitude can cause some physical reaction in almost anyone. Most people experience shortness of breath, headaches, and some dehydration. We recommend taking it easy your first day and avoiding alcohol and tobacco. If you feel sick, be sure to rest, breathe deeply, drink lots of fluids (bottled water), and perhaps take a mild pain killer for headaches. True altitude sickness is rare, but if the symptoms become severe, please let a Bio Bio Expeditions representative know. The front desk of the hotel often has spare oxygen bottles if needed.

How well your individual body adapts to the thinner air depends a good deal on innate factors that you have no control over. That being said, people in top shape often acclimate better because they expend less energy hiking, leaving their bodies ready for the task of acclimatization. Proper hydration has also been proven to be essential in this task. There is no substitute for being in top shape and staying hydrated!

Many altitude physicians recommend bringing the following medications for prevention and or treatment of altitude related problems.

- Diamox- e.g. 125 mg, twice a day. Beginning 24 hours before ascent to a sleeping elevation of 8,000-10,000 feet and continuing through duration of climb. Please discuss with your physician.

Hygiene and First Aid

It's extremely important that group members follow the simple rules we have to prevent people getting sick on these trips. All drinking water is either boiled or treated with iodine. Any fruit that does not get peeled should be peeled first (i.e. Apples). Any time anyone is handling food they need to wash their hands with Dettol soap and treated water. And always wash your hands after going to the toilet.

We carry a comprehensive first aid kit that has evolved out of 25 years running expeditions in the Himalayas. All the guides are trained in first aid; they are either holders of advanced first aid or EMTs. We need to know from all expedition members if they have any medical conditions that we should know about, eg. severe allergies or if you are diabetic. It's better that we know about these conditions before the trip rather than being surprised later.

If you have any broken skin, infection is always a risk so look after even the tiniest cuts.

Women are advised to bring any feminine hygiene products that may be needed with you on the trip.

It is extremely important that you remember at all times to re-hydrate yourself. On an average day you are recommended to drink around 3 liters of water. While in Bhutan, we recommend that you remember to drink AT LEAST this much and if possible, more.

Country Information

Demographics

Bhutanese people can be generally categorized into three main ethnic groups. The Tshanglas, Ngalops and the Lhotshampas. The other minority groups are the Bumthaps and the Khengpas of Central Bhutan, the Kurtoeps in Lhuentse, the Brokpas and the Bramis of Merak and Sakteng in eastern Bhutan, the Doyas of Samtse and finally the Monpas of Rukha villages in WangduePhodrang. Together the multiethnic Bhutanese population number just over 700,000.

Tshanglas: The Tshanglas or the Sharchops as they are commonly known, are considered the aboriginal inhabitants of eastern Bhutan. Tshanglas are according to historians, the descendants of Lord Brahma and speak Tshanglakha. They are commonly inhabitants of Mongar, Trashigang, Trashiyangtse, Pema Gasthel and Samdrup Jongkhar. Besides cultivation of maize, rice, wheat, barley and vegetables, the Tshanglas also rear domestic animals to supplement their living. Weaving is a popular occupation among their women and they produce beautiful fabrics mainly of silk and raw silk.

Ngalops: The Ngalops who have settled mostly in the six regions of western Bhutan are of Tibetan origin. They speak Ngalopkha, a polished version of Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan. Agriculture is their main livelihood. They cultivate cereals such as rice, wheat, barley and maize along with a variety of other crops. In the regions of Thimphu and Paro apples are also cultivated as a cash crop. They are known for Lozeys, or ornamental speech and for Zheys, dances that are unique to the Ngalops.

Lhotshampas: The Lhotshampas have settled in the southern foothills of the country. It is believed that they migrated from Nepal in the beginning of the 19th century, attracted by the employment opportunities provided by the many construction works taking place in the kingdom. They speak Lhotshamkha (Nepali) and practice Hinduism. Their society can be broken into various lineages such as the Bhawans, Chhetris, Rai's,

Limbus, Tamangs, Gurungs, and the Lepchas. Nowadays they are mainly employed in agriculture and cultivate cash crops like ginger, cardamom and oranges.

The Bumthaps, Mangdeps and Khengpas: The people who speak Bumtapkha, Mangdepkha and khengkha respectively inhabit the central areas of Bhutan. The Bumthaps cultivate buck wheat, potatoes and vegetables. A section of this population also rear yaks and sheep and produce fabrics of wool and yak hair. The Mangdeps depend on cultivation of rice, wheat, maize, vegetables, etc besides rearing domestic animals. The khengpas are also dependent on agriculture much like the Mangdeps, however, they are also known for the bamboo and cane craft.

Kurtoeps: Kurtoeps inhabit the eastern part of the country. Specifically the district of Lhuentse and the villages are found spread along the banks of Kurichu. Khoma women are expert weavers and are known for their skill in weaving the grandiose Kushithara.

The Brokpas and the Bramis: The Brokpas and the Bramis are a semi nomadic community. They are settled in the two villages of Merak and Sakteng in eastern Bhutan. They mostly depend on yaks and sheep for their livelihood and do not typically grow crops due to the high altitude zones they inhabit. They speak a different dialect and have their own unique dress that is made of yak hair and sheep wool. They are also experts in cane and bamboo crafts.

The Layaps: To the extreme north are the Layaps who speak layapkha. Like the Brokpas, they are semi-nomadic and their livelihood is dependent upon yaks and sheep. They use the products of their herd animals to barter rice, salt and other consumables with the people of WangduePhodrang and Punakha.

The Doyas: A tribal community that has settled mostly in southern Bhutan. They are considered the aboriginal inhabitants of western and central Bhutan, who over the years migrated to and settled in the present areas in Dorokha. They have their own unique dialect and style of dress.

Monpas: The Monpas are a small community in Rukha under WangduePhodrang. Together with the Doyas they are also considered the original settlers of central Bhutan. They have their own unique dialect but it is unfortunately slowly dying out as they are now being absorbed into the main stream Bhutanese society.

Society

Bhutanese society is free of class or a caste system. Slavery was abolished by the Third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck in the early 1950s through a royal edict. Though, a few organizations to empower women were established in the past Bhutanese society has always maintained relative gender equality. In general this nation is an open and a good-spirited society.

Living in Bhutanese society generally means understanding some accepted norms such as Driglam Namzha, the traditional code of etiquette. Driglam Namzha teaches people a code of conduct to adhere to as members of a respectful society. Examples of Driglam Namzha include wearing a traditional scarf (kabney) when visiting a Dzong or an office, letting the elders and the monks serve themselves first during meals, offering felicitation scarves during ceremonies such as marriages and promotions and politely greeting elders or seniors.

Normally, greetings are limited to saying “Kuzuzangpo” (hello) amongst equals. For seniors and elders, the Bhutanese bow their head a bit and say “kuzuzangpo la” (a more respectful greeting). Recently, shaking hands has become an accepted norm.

The Bhutanese are a fun-loving people fond of song and dance, friendly contests of archery, stone pitching, traditional darts, basketball and football. They are a social people that enjoy weddings, religious holidays and other events as the perfect opportunities to gather with friends and family.

The openness of Bhutanese society is exemplified in the way they often visit their friends and relatives at any hour of the day without any advance notice or appointment and still receive a warm welcome and hospitality.

Religion

The Bhutanese constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Citizens and visitors are free to practice any form of worship, so long as it does not impinge on the rights of others. Christianity, Hinduism and Islam are also present in the country.

Buddhism

Bhutan is a Buddhist country and people often refer to it as the last stronghold of Vajrayana Buddhism. Buddhism was first introduced by the Indian Tantric master Guru Padmasambhava in the 8th century. Until then the people practiced Bonism a religion that worshipped all forms of nature, remnants of which are still evident.

Until then the people practiced Bonism a religion that worshipped all forms of nature, remnants of which are still evident even today in some remote villages in the country.

With the visit of Guru Padmasambhava, Buddhism began to take firm roots within the country and this especially led to the propagation of the Nyingmapa (the ancient or the older) school of Buddhism.

Phajo Drugom Zhigp from Ralung in Tibet was instrumental in introducing yet another school of Buddhism – the Drukpa Kagyu sect. In 1222 he came to Bhutan, an event of great historical significance and a major milestone for Buddhism in Bhutan, and established the DrukpaKagyi sect of Buddhism, the state religion. His sons and descendants were also instrumental in spreading it to many other regions of western Bhutan.

By far the greatest contributor was Zhabdrung Nawang Namgyal. His arrival in 1616 from Tibet was another landmark event in the history of the nation. He brought the various Buddhist schools that had developed in western Bhutan under his domain and unified the country as one whole nation-state giving it a distinct national identity.

The Buddhism practiced in the country today is a vibrant religion that permeates nearly every facet of the Bhutanese life style. It is present in the Dzongs, monasteries, stupas, prayer flags, and prayer wheels punctuate the Bhutanese landscape. The chime of ritual bells, sound of gongs, people circumambulating temples and stupas, fluttering prayer flags, red robed monks conducting rituals stand as testaments to the importance of Buddhism in Bhutanese life.

Gross National Happiness: Development Philosophy of Bhutan

Economists the world over have argued that the key to happiness is obtaining and enjoying material development. Bhutan however, adheres to a very different belief and advocates that amassing material wealth does not necessarily lead to happiness. Bhutan is now trying to measure progress not by the popular idea of Gross Domestic Product, but by through Gross National Happiness.

His Majesty the third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck expressed his view on the goals of development as making “the people prosperous and happy.” With this strong view in mind, the importance of “prosperity and happiness,” was highlighted in the King’s address on the occasion of Bhutan’s admission to the United Nations in 1971.

While the emphasis is placed on both, prosperity and happiness, the latter is considered to be more significant. The fourth Druk Gyalpo emphasized that for Bhutan “Gross National Happiness,” is more important than “Gross National Product.” Thus, Gross National Happiness is now being fleshed out by a wide range of professionals, scholars and agencies across the world.

Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck said that the rich are not always happy while the happy generally considered themselves rich. While conventional development models stressed on economic growth as the ultimate objective, the concept of Gross National Happiness is based on the premise that true development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other.

The philosophy of Gross National Happiness has recently received international recognition and the UN has implemented a resolution “...recognizing that the gross domestic product [...] does not adequately reflect the happiness and well-being of people,” and that “...the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal”.

Language

Bhutanese speak a variety of languages with Dzongkha being the national language and one of the most widely spoken. English is also spoken by the majority of Bhutanese making communication very easy. It is encouraged to speak with the local Bhutanese, especially in the urban areas and towns, as it will enhance your knowledge on Bhutan.

Environmental Concerns

Population increase in Bhutan is putting more pressure on this fragile pristine environment. It's important that any impact tourism has is positive. So often the influx of tourists to a beautiful area seems to change the area and people to the point where it's no longer desirable to visit that area. This need not be the case. With the right attitude, tourism can bring about a cross-cultural exchange that is beneficial to everyone.

All our expeditions are run with total respect for the environment and cultures of the countries we visit. Our campsites are left scrupulously clean, leaving only footprints that will hopefully be blown away. All burnable waste is burnt. All non-biological waste, like tins and bottles, are washed and carried off the trek. Vegetable waste is buried away from the camp, and toilet pits are dug well away from the camp. Toilet paper is collected in a disposable bag and burnt on the campfire in the morning just before breaking camp. Perhaps the most important thing to bring is a good mental attitude...

Photography

Bhutan offers immense opportunities for photography especially during outdoor sightseeing trips. However, you should check with your guide before taking pictures or filming inside Dzongs, temples, monasteries and religious institutions as in some area photograph/filming is not permitted.

You are free to capture images of the landscape, the panoramic views of the mountain ranges, rural life, flora and fauna, distinctive Bhutanese architecture and the exterior of Dzongs and Chortens in particular.

CULTURAL CONCERNS

Communication

A smile and a cheerful greeting will open doors. Charades is the usual second language in Bhutan. Be creative. The Bhutan language is relatively easy to learn, and even knowing a handful of words will increase your enjoyment of Bhutan immeasurably.

Other

As in most of Asia, the right hand is used for eating, giving or accepting things. The left hand is considered unclean because it is used with water in place of toilet paper. Therefore you should always use your right hand to give or receive anything.

It is also considered rude to step over people, point your feet at people or walk across the hearth, as the feet are also considered to be unclean. And it is not polite to touch people on the head as this is a sacred part of a person. When in doubt, watch what the local people do and emulate (not everything, mind you)!

Flora and Fauna

Bhutan is one of the last remaining biodiversity hotspots in the world, forest cover has now increased to over 72% of the country, with 60% of the country under protection. The array of flora and fauna available in Bhutan is unparalleled due to conservation and its wide altitudinal and climatic range. Physically, the country can be divided into three zones:

1. Alpine Zone (4000m and above) with no forest cover
2. Temperate Zone (2000 to 4000m) with conifer or broadleaf forests
3. Subtropical Zone (150m to 2000m) with Tropical or Subtropical vegetation

Forest types in Bhutan are fir forests, mixed conifer forest, blue pine forest, chirpine forest, broadleaf mixed with conifer, upland hardwood forest, lowland hardwood forest, and tropical lowland forests. Almost 60% of the plant species found in the eastern Himalayan region are present in Bhutan.

Bhutan boasts of about 300 species of medicinal plants and about 46 species of rhododendrons. Some common sights for the visitors are the magnolias, junipers, orchids of varied hues, gentian, medicinal plants, Daphne, giant rhubarb, the blue and trees such as fir, pine and oaks.

A wide range of rare and endangered animals can also be found frequenting the dense jungles and high mountains of Bhutan. Due to the countries conservation efforts and its unspoiled natural environment Bhutan supports thriving populations of some of the rarest animals on earth and has thus been classified as one of the last biodiversity hotspots in the world.

Some high altitude species are the snow leopards, Bengal tigers that are found at altitude ranging 3000 to 4000 meters, the red panda, the gorals and the langurs, the Himalayan black bear, sambars, wild pigs, barking deer, blue sheep and musk deer.

In the tropical forests of Southern Bhutan one can come across clouded leopards, the one horned rhinoceros, elephants, water buffaloes and swamp deer. You can even find the Golden Langur, a species of monkey that is unique to Bhutan.

Bhutan also has a great variety of bird species. It is recognized as an area of high biological diversity and is known as the East Himalayan 'hot spot', the hub of 221 global endemic bird areas. The recorded number of bird species is over 670 and is expected to rise as new birds are discovered.

In addition, 57% of Bhutan's globally threatened birds and 90% of the country's rare birds are dependent on forests. Bhutan has about 415 resident bird species. These birds are altitudinal refugees, moving up and down the mountains depending upon the seasons and weather conditions. Of about 50 species of birds that migrate during the winters are the buntings, waders, ducks, thrushes and the birds of prey. Some 40 species are partial migrants and they include species such as swifts, cuckoos, bee-eaters, fly catchers and warblers.

Bhutan is also home to about 16 bird species that are endangered worldwide. These include the White bellied heron, Pallas Fish eagle and Blyth's King fisher to name a few. Phobjikha valley in Wangdue Phodrang and Bomdeling in Trashigang are also two especially important locations of the endangered Black Necked Cranes.

As one of the ten global hotspots, Bhutan is committed to preserve and protect its rich environment through its government and environmental organizations. This commitment is apparent in the fact that the kingdom has the distinct honor of being one of the only nations whose forest cover has actually grown over the years.

Weather

Average Temperature in Degree Centigrade. (oC) Max / Min

Places	Months											
	Jan	Feb	March	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Paro	9.4 / -8	13.4 / 0.6	14.5 / 0.6	17.6 / 4.6	23.5 / 10.6	25.4 / 14.1	26.8 / 14.9	25.3 / 14.7	23.4 / 11.7	18.7 / 7.4	13.9 / 1.4	11.2 / -1.7
Thimphu	12.3 / -2.6	14.4 / 0.6	16.4 / 3.9	20.0 / 7.1	22.5 / 12.1	24.4 / 15.2	18.9 / 13.4	25.0 / 15.8	23.1 / 15	21.9 / 10.4	17.9 / 5.0	14.5 / -1.1
Punakha	16.1 / 4.2	19.6 / 5.3	21.12 / 9.2	24.4 / 1.2	27.2 / 14.8	31.2 / 19.5	32.0 / 21.6	31.4 / 19.8	29.9 / 20.4	27.8 / 18.9	22.3 / 13.0	15.0 / 7.9
Wangdi	17.0 / 4.3	19.0 / 7.8	22.8 / 10.4	26.2 / 12.9	29.1 / 17.7	29.2 / 20.1	18.4 / 16.2	29.1 / 20.0	27.5 / 19.1	26.1 / 14.7	22.6 / 9.6	19.1 / 6.3
Trongsa	13.0 / 0.2	13.9 / 0.4	16.7 / 4.4	20.1 / 6.6	21.0 / 11.6	22.2 / 13.6	25.3 / 15.3	23.8 / 15.0	22.6 / 14.2	21.8 / 11.7	19.8 / 6.4	18.2 / 2.5
Bumthang	10.8 / -5.1	10.0 / -1.4	16.2 / 3.5	18.7 / 3.9	21.3 / 9.5	22.5 / 3.5	14.1 / 10.9	23.0 / 13.7	21.6 / 12.1	19.5 / 5.9	16.1 / -0.5	12.3 / -2.3
Mongar	15.5 / 8.2	15.9 / 8.3	20.0 / 11.6	28.0 / 14.0	25.1 / 17.4	26.1 / 19.5	16.1 / 15.8	25.4 / 19.6	24.7 / 19.4	22.7 / 15.8	19.9 / 11.2	15.7 / 9.5
Tashigang	20.4 / 10.5	21.7 / 11.5	24.8 / 14.4	28.3 / 17.0	30.0 / 20.6	30.7 / 22.6	31.5 / 23.1	30.2 / 22.7	30.0 / 23.9	29.1 / 17.7	26.1 / 13.6	23.0 / 11.6

Recommended Reading

- *Bhutan: Himalayan Mountain Kingdom* by Francoise Pommaret
- *Beyond the Sky and Earth* by Jamie Zeppa
- *Dreams of the Peaceful Dragon* by Katie Hickman
- *Under the Holy Lake* by Ken Haigh
- *Married to Bhutan* by Linda Leaming
- *The Blessings of Bhutan* by Russ and Blyth Carpenter
- *So Close to Heaven: The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas* by Barbara Crossette
- *Seeing with the Third Eye* by T.Sangay Wangchuk

Travel Resources

Travel

www.lonelyplanet.com/bhutan - Lonely Planet

Money

www.xe.net/ucc - This is a universal currency converter site.

www.oanda.com - Exchange rates and currency forecasts

www.bob.bt/contact-us/atm-locator - A list of ATM machines in Bhutan

Clothing / Gear

www.patagonia.com - Expedition clothing.

www.rei.com - Expedition gear and clothing.

www.mountainhardwear.com - Tents, sleeping bags, expeditions wear.

www.exofficio.com - Lightweight travel clothes - Great for Safaris!

www.eaglecreek.com - Excellent travel gear and packing tips from the experts

www.cameraworld.com - The best prices on camera and video gear!

www.nrsweb.com - Anything you could ever want for the river.

www.llbean.com - Gear and clothing for any adventure.

Health

www.cdc.gov/travel - All the latest recommendations on vaccination and important information on health concerns worldwide.

Passport and Embassy Information

www.travel.state.gov/passport - How to get a passport fast! - List of Embassies worldwide.

Weather

www.accuweather.com - Find out the weather anywhere in the world!

Travel Warnings

www.travel.state.gov/travel/ - State department warnings for overseas travelers.

Conservation

www.bhutanfound.org - The Bhutan Foundation - Contributes to strategies of conservation of the environment, equitable and sustainable development, good governance, and preservation of culture in Bhutan.

www.edf.org – Environmental Defense Fund - Stay current on all environmental issues

www.tnc.org - The Nature Conservancy - Saving the last great rivers

www.panda.org - World Wildlife Fund - Their mission is to stop the degradation of our planet's natural environment, and build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

www.irn.org - International Rivers Network - Supports local communities working to protect their rivers and watersheds.

Map of Bhutan

