



TRAVEL GUIDELINES FOR BHUTAN





PASSPORT, VISA, & TREK REQUIREMENTS

Your passport should be valid for at least six months after your planned date of departure from Bhutan. Visa clearance documentation will be sent you prior to your travel date. You must produce the visa approval document, travel insurance certificate and e-tickets at the time of boarding the flight to Bhutan. The actual visa stamping is done at Paro Airport. Please post these documents in your traveling mailbox. In the event you lose the papers you can always download from the mailbox.

Please make sure to travel with the same passport on which the Bhutan visa was issued. We will not be held responsible if the passport on which the visa was issued does not match the passport used to travel to Bhutan. In such an event, you will not be allowed to board the flight or enter Bhutan.

ENTRY / EXIT:

By Land: Entry By Air: Phuntsholing / Samdrup Jongkhar - We will forward the Visa Clearance doc to you. Etho Metho Representative / Guide will meet you / drop you off at the border town (Phuntsholing/Samdrup Jongkhar) and handle

entry / exit formalities for you. Please bring along your Visa Clearance doc & Passport to the Immigration Check Point. The guide will be carrying a copy of your Visa Clearance doc as well. We will forward your E-tickets and Visa Clearance doc to you. Please call the Druk Air / Bhutan Airlines Office in your respective flights sectors to reconfirm your flight timing (details are below).

TIME ZONE

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

BUSINESS HOURS

Some of the banks that you can avail of while in Bhutan are the Bank of Bhutan Limited, the Bhutan National Bank, the Druk PNB and the Tashi Bank. Many of these banks provide internet banking facilities

Banks are closed on Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

General Working Hours in Bhutan: Monday - Friday

Nov - Feb: 9 AM - 4 PM / Mar - Oct: 9 AM - 5 PM



HEALTH & SAFETY

Before embarking on a trip to Bhutan, please seek advice from your doctor about vaccinations and appropriate medication you should have prior to your travels. As a minimum you should have tetanus, typhoid and hepatitis A inoculations

CURRENCY & FOREIGN EXCHANGE

Bhutan's currency is the Ngultrum (Nu.). The Ngultrum is fixed to the value of Indian rupees. You are advised to carry your money in the form of cash (US dollars would be best), which might be used for incidental purchases/expenses. There are bank branches in all major towns.

Cash or bank notes in USD 100 from 1996 or earlier will not be accepted in Bhutan. Please ensure that your USD 100 bills are dated from 1997 onwards. The exchange rate for higher denominations of all currencies (USD/Euro/AUD 100) is higher compared to smaller denominations (USD/Euro/AUD 50, 20, 10, 5, 1). INR 2000 cash or bank notes are not accepted in Bhutan. You are advised to carry new or relatively new cash or bank notes as they are readily accepted by shops, hotels, restaurants, and other establishments. Old, partially torn, or worn-out cash or bank notes are generally not accepted.

A few hotels and shops in Thimphu accept payment by credit card, but with a surcharge added. Visas cards are more widely accepted than MasterCard or American Express. Daily expenditure varies from person to person, but in general you should allow US\$5-10 daily for laundry, drinks, phone calls overseas, small souvenirs, postcards, and stamps.

While credit cards are accepted, many international banks and credit card companies view transactions in Bhutan with suspicion due to the country's limited global recognition. Therefore, we recommend informing your bank and requesting their authorization for transactions in Bhutan. You can do this either before your trip, if your bank or credit card company allows it in advance, or just prior to making a transaction while you are in Bhutan.

ATMs (Automated Teller Machines) are not available. The government has issued a notification to banks to remove ATMs by the end of 2023 as these machines have become redundant due to the gaining popularity of digital transactions in the country. Visitors can bring cash equivalent up to USD 10,000

ELECTRICITY

In Bhutan, electricity runs on 220 / 240 volts, with round hole two-pin and three-pin power outlets. If you bring electrical appliances, also pack appropriate adapter plugs. In Thimphu electrical appliance shops stock adapter plugs, but they are unlikely to be available elsewhere.

DINING

The most distinctive characteristic of Bhutanese cuisine is its spiciness. Chillies are an essential part of nearly every dish in Bhutan. Rice forms the main body of most Bhutanese meals. It is accompanied by one or two side dishes consisting of meat or vegetables. Pork, beef and chicken are the meats that are eaten most often. Vegetables commonly eaten include Spinach, pumpkins, turnips, radishes, tomatoes, river weed, onions and green beans. Grains such as rice, buckwheat and barley are also cultivated in various regions of the country depending on the local climate.

Some of the most popular Bhutanese dishes are:

Ema Datshi: This is the National Dish of Bhutan. A spicy mix of chillies and local cheese known as Datshi. This dish is a staple of nearly every meal and can be found throughout the country.

Momos: These Tibetan-style dumplings are stuffed with pork, beef or cabbages and cheese and are cooked during special occasions.

Phaksha Paa: Pork cooked with spicy red chillies.

Jasha Maru: Spicy minced chicken, tomatoes and other ingredients that is usually served with rice.

Red Rice: The rice is similar to brown rice and is extremely nutritious and filling. When cooked it is pale pink, soft and slightly sticky.

VISITING PLACES OF WORSHIP

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 coin, a prayer will be intoned for you. Take your cue from the Bhutanese on such occasions and, when in doubt, ask your guide what would be the appropriate thing to do. Photography is usually permitted in public areas, such as courtyards and dance grounds, but not permitted inside the chapels of religious complexes. Check first with your guide to avoid inadvertently giving offence.

Dress neatly and modestly and wear full sleeved collared shirts (covered arms, no shorts or short skirts) and remove hats, caps, sunglasses before entering the precincts of Dzongs or religious



complexes. Do not smoke. 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. Shoes are not allowed inside the chapels of religious complexes, you will have to take them off at entrance / door.

CUSTOMS & DECLARATIONS

Visitors are required to complete a passenger declaration form for checking by concerned officers on arrival. The following articles are exempt from duty:

- (a) Personal articles for day to day use by the visitor.
- (b) Instruments, apparatus or appliances for professional use.
- (c) Photographic equipment, video cameras and other electronic goods for personal use.

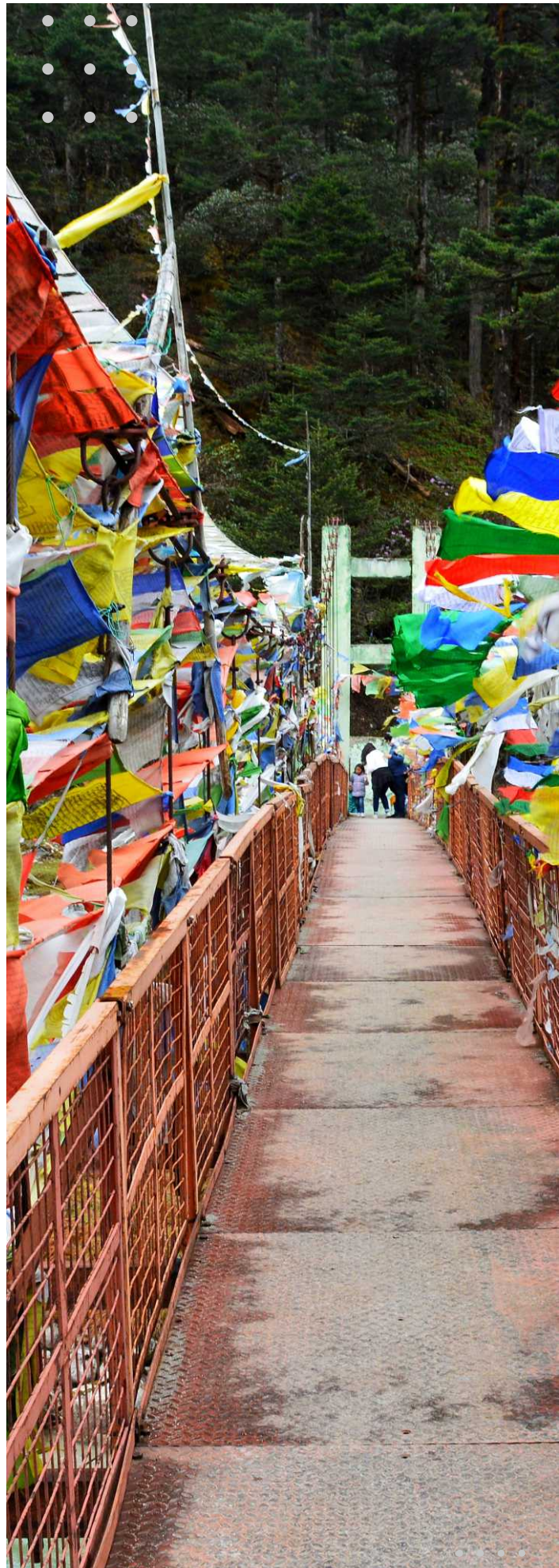
The articles mentioned under (b) & (c) must be declared on the declaration form. If any such items are disposed of in Bhutan by sale or gift, they are liable for customs duty. On departure, visitors are required to surrender their forms to the Customs authorities.

*Import / Export restrictions of the following goods is strictly prohibited:

- (a) Arms, ammunitions and explosives.
- (b) All narcotics and drugs except medically prescribed drugs.
- (c) Wildlife products, especially those of endangered species.
- (d) Antiques.

*Imports of plants, soils etc. are subject to quarantine regulations. These items must be cleared on arrival. Visitors are advised to be cautious in purchasing old and used items, especially of religious or cultural significance, as such items may not be exported without a clearance certificate. The Ground Handling Agent's advice should be sought before committing to such purchases.

*Import of Tobacco products for personal consumption requires payment of import duty. Kindly bring your own Tobacco products and declare at the Customs counter at the airport in Paro or if traveling by road at the Immigration / Customs check points in Samdrup Jongkar and Phuntsholing. You will have to carry with you the Customs Receipt (proof of import duty payment) at all times as you may be asked to show the Customs Receipt by the local authorities if seen smoking in public areas.





*The permitted amount is 300 sticks of cigarette or 250 grams of tobacco products or 50 pieces of cigars. You will be charged a 200% import duty (approx USD 50 per carton of cigarettes).

*Possession of tobacco products within the permissible quantity and without proof of tax payment shall be fined Nu. 10,000 (approx USD 200).

*Possession of tobacco products beyond the permissible quantity but less than 3 times the permissible amount and without proof of tax payments will be considered a petty misdemeanour.

*Possession of tobacco products more than 3 times but less than or equal to 4 times the permissible amount and without proof of tax payments will be considered a misdemeanour.

*Possession of tobacco products more than 4 times the permissible amount and without proof of tax payments will be considered a fourth degree felony

CLIMATE

A trip to Bhutan can be planned throughout the year but the best months are March, April, May,

September, October and November. There are several festivals taking place during these months as well.

The southern part of Bhutan is tropical, and in general the eastern region of the country is warmer than the central valleys. However, bear in mind that the higher the altitude, the cooler the weather, and that with a brisk wind blowing down off the mountains, even a low-lying valley can become quite chilly.

The central valleys of Punakha, Mongar, Wangduephodrang, Tashigang and Lhuentse enjoy a semi-tropical climate with cool winters, whilst Paro, Thimphu, Tongsa and Bumthang have a much harsher climate, with summer monsoon rains and winter snowfalls which may block passes leading into the central valleys for days at a time. Winter in Bhutan is from mid-November till mid-March, and at this time of the year the climate is dry and sunny for the most part, temperatures peaking at around 15 degree Celsius in the daytime and falling below zero at night. The monsoon usually arrives in mid-June, with light rain falling mainly in the afternoons and evenings. At the end of September, after the last of the big rains, autumn suddenly arrives, and is a magnificent season for trekking until November.

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

INSURANCE

We strongly advise travellers to get a comprehensive travel & medical insurance before travelling to Bhutan. If you are coming on a trek, your medical / travel insurance must include provision for evacuation by helicopter and repatriation - should this be necessary.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The photographic opportunities on all trips are immense. The natural scenery is superb, and you will also wish to record the local people, their houses, and shops etc. Always ask by a gesture if it is ok to do so. Don't take your destination as a living museum! Also, note that photography in shrine rooms of dzongs, monasteries and religious institutions is generally not permitted. Outdoor photography is usually permitted, but when visiting such places, please check with your guide before taking any photographs.

LOCAL CUSTOMS (Etiquette for visits to Dzongs, Monasteries, Temples & Festivals :)

Clothing & behaviour: Dress neatly and modestly (covered arms, no shorts, or short skirts) and do not wear a hat in the precincts of Dzongs or religious complexes. Do not smoke. 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.

Photography: Photography is usually permitted in public areas, such as courtyards and dance grounds, but not permitted inside the chapels of religious complexes. Check first with your guide to avoid in



advertently giving offence, and always take care not to intrude upon 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 give offence to all Bhutanese who see you!

TELEPHONE/COMMUNICATION

Most of the major towns and cities in Bhutan are equipped with basic communication facilities that include telephone, fax, and internet service. Most of the bigger hotels provide email, internet and WiFi facilities within the hotel premises. Visitors can get a sim card from visitor information centres on arrival, branch offices of Bhutan Telecom and Tashi Cell or from authorized agents in towns.

SHOPPING

The Cottage and Small Industries (CSI) outlet, handicraft shops, the OGOP outlets, and the Centenary Farmers Market are some of the popular shopping areas for visitors. Guests are required to process export permits online [<https://mocp.doc.gov.bt/>] for non-antique

products such as statues, ritual objects and religious handicrafts from the Department of Culture before exiting the country. For a detailed list of prohibited, restricted or declarable items, please visit the website of the Ministry of Finance [<https://www.mof.gov.bt>]. 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 travellers in Bhutan. Thimphu has the most extensive range of textiles, but for Yatra (hand-woven woollen 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 and related travellers' checks for expenses in Bhutan. The higher denomination notes have better exchange value. Credit cards are accepted in few handicraft stores and 5-star hotels.

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. Etho Metho's advice should be sought before committing to such purchases. It is best to buy more expensive items at reputable shops, which provide receipts as proof of purchase.





Tourists buying gold from the duty-free Shops in Phuntsholing & Thimphu

All tourists can buy 20 grams of gold if they fulfil the following requirements:

1. Pay Sustainable Development Fee (SDF)
2. Produce receipt for spending a minimum of one night in the Department of Tourism certified hotel.
3. Pay in USD
4. Produce visa/permit copy. Or SDF payment receipt issued by the Department of Revenue and Customs
5. Submit photocopy of the passport and voter identity card also accepted for Indians

Duty Free Shops: Location & Contact Numbers

1. Phuntsholing
Address: Bank of Bhutan (Main Branch)
Contact Number: 17455553
Opening Hours: 10am – 3pm (Monday – Friday) & closed on weekends
2. Thimphu
Address: Norzin Lam, Chubachu
Contact Number: 17856807
Opening Hours: 10am – 3pm (Wednesday – Monday) & closed on Tuesday only.

Gold Price

Please find the link below to check gold prices sold by the Bhutan Duty Free Limited (BDFL) shops. And please take note of the 'IMPORTANT' advisory.

<https://gold-bt.onrender.com>

BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE

Druk Air & Bhutan Airlines Checked Baggage Allowance (International Flight)

The checked baggage allowances on scheduled international flights are as follows:

Business Class 40 kg
Economy Class 30 kg

Infants paying only 10% of the applicable air fare are not entitled to any free baggage allowance.

Druk Air & Checked Baggage Allowance (Domestic Flight)

The checked baggage allowances on scheduled international flights are as follows:

Business Class 30 kg
Economy Class 20 kg

The following Articles may be carried free of charge over and above the Free Baggage Allowance

- A ladies handbag, pocket book or purse, which

is appropriate to normal traveling dress and which is not being used as a container to carry articles which would otherwise be regarded as excess baggage.

- An overcoat wrap or blanket
- An umbrella or walking stick
- A small camera and/or a pair of binoculars
- A reasonable amount of reading matter for the flight
- Infants food for consumption in flight and infants carrying basket
- An invalids fully collapsible wheelchair and/or crutches or other prosthetic device for the passengers use provided the passenger is dependent on them

All other articles - such as flight bags, briefcases, typewriters, ladies' vanity cases, large size cameras, etc - will be weighed and, if applicable, excess baggage charges will be levied.

Unchecked Baggage / Cabin Baggage Special Regulations

- Regulations issued by the Drukair & Bhutan Airlines stipulate that your cabin baggage must be placed in the overhead bin. Therefore, the overall dimensions are limited to 45 + 35 + 20 cm (17 + 13 + 8 inches). The weight must not exceed 5 kgs in Economy class and 7 kgs in Business class.
- These regulations shall ensure that the cabin baggage will not impede evacuation of aircraft cabin in case of emergency.
- Please consider this when packing your baggage and kindly ensure that any item

exceeding the above limitations is sent as checked baggage.

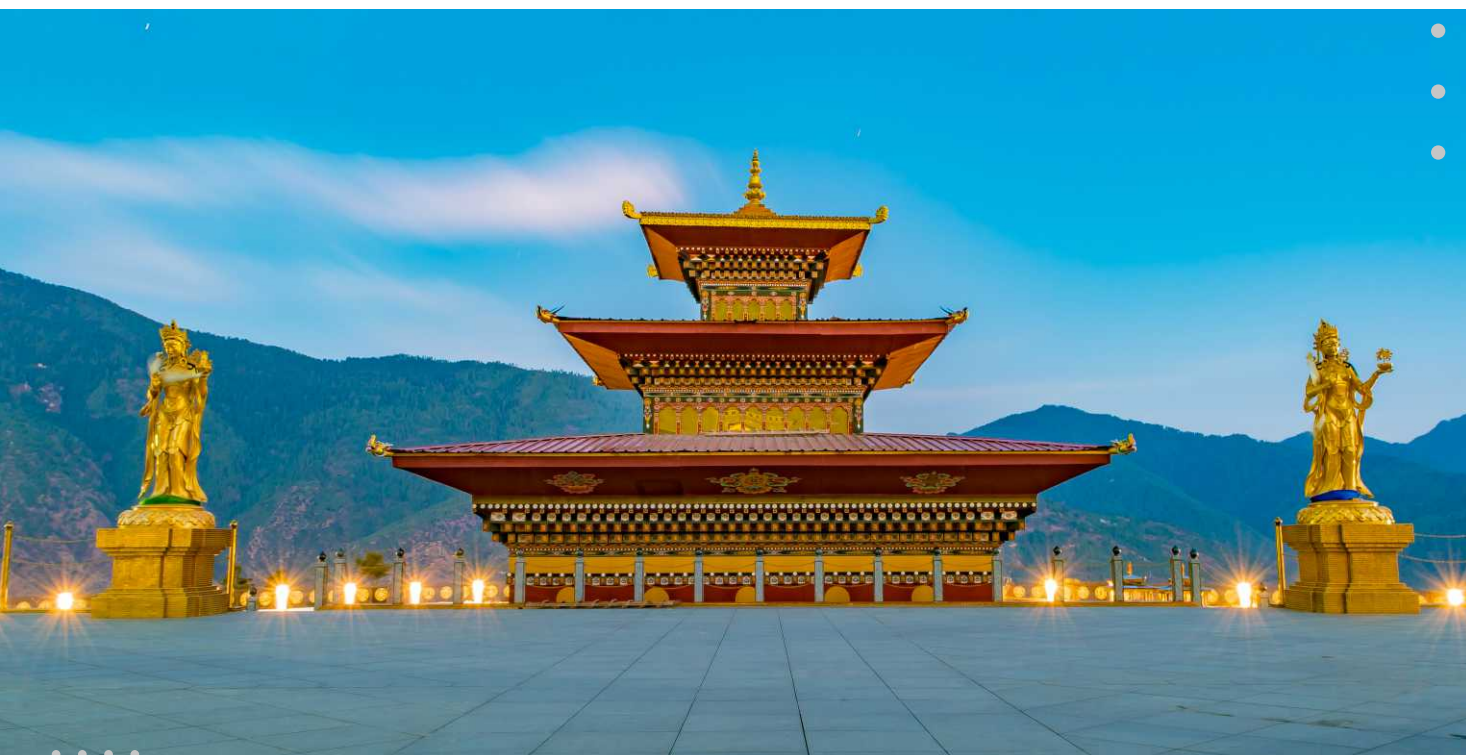
- Spot checks will be performed during embarkation to ensure that these regulations are being followed

Baggage Guidelines

1. For the purpose of easy identification, please label all baggage on the inside as well as on the outside with your name, address and telephone no.
2. Name labels are available at all Drukair offices and check-in counters.
3. Remember to lock your baggage to prevent it from falling open.
4. The Carriers are not liable for loss of, damage to or delay in the delivery of fragile or perishable articles, money, jewellery, silverware, negotiable papers, securities or other valuables, business documents or samples or medicines or drugs which are included in the passenger's baggage, whether with or without the knowledge of the carrier.
5. Please note that all Airline Members of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) are required to observe the following baggage regulations

Excess Baggage

The charge per kg of excess baggage is equivalent to 1.5% of the highest normal adult one way economy class fare or as specified by the airlines.





WHAT TO PACK

The following is an exhaustive list of what you should pack for the trip. Please carefully read the sections on Climate and Clothing under General Information (below) before packing your clothing.

(1) Everyone: Small day pack; proper pouch to hold your travel documents, money, air tickets and other valuable items / documents; clothes as per season, & a poncho or rain gear & / or umbrella (June-September); facecloth, soap, hair shampoo, cold water detergent, sunglasses / spare glasses, comfortable walking shoes, pocket knife, hat, camera and accessories insect repellent, hand cream, torch or flash light with spare batteries, sun cream, lip salve, soluble aspirin, antiseptic cream, anti-histamine cream, anti-diarrhoea pills, a preparation for the relief of sunburn, and any medication you take regularly, or might need to take for a periodically recurring condition, such as asthma.

- 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.
- If you wear contact lenses, bring a pair of spectacles as well, as at high altitudes contact lenses can irritate the eyes.

(2) Trekkers: In addition to the above, bring sleeping bag and Thermo rest; comfortable

trekking boots which have already been broken in and plenty of pairs of socks, noting that woollen socks dry quicker than cotton ones. Also bring a water bottle and plastic bags for packing clothing while on trek, as plastic bags are banned in Bhutan.

CLOTHING

Due to the wide range of temperature and climatic conditions it is advisable to dress in layers. For protection against cold, layered clothing is better than one or two thick garments. Clothing should preferably be made from natural materials, which allow the body to breathe. Bring comfortable, well-worn clothing, and plenty of underwear and socks. If traveling in the cold season, bring two sets of silk vests and long johns, as they are warm and dry quickly after washing. Dress modestly and respectfully for visits to monasteries, Dzongs and other religious institutions. Remove hats, caps etc. before entering, and refrain from smoking on the premises.

LANGUAGE

Bhutanese speak a variety of languages, Dzongkha being the national language and one most widely spoken. English is also spoken by the majority of Bhutanese, making communication very easy.



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