



Understand Bhutan

BHUTAN TODAY 180

How does a society based on tradition operate within the modern world and its demands?

HISTORY 183

An early history steeped in myths and mysticism gave birth to this remarkable and unique country.

THE BHUTANESE WAY OF LIFE 206

Buddhism permeates the everyday lives of the Bhutanese, who respect the environment and are quick to smile and laugh.

BUDDHISM IN BHUTAN 215

Get an understanding of Bhutan's take on perhaps the most accommodating of the world's religions, and its murals and monsters.

TRADITIONAL ARTS 226

Traditional clothes and weaving are just part of the Thirteen Arts passed down from generation to generation.

ARCHITECTURE 233

Bhutanese architecture, right down to traditional houses, is one of the most striking features of the country.

MOUNTAINS & VALLEYS 241

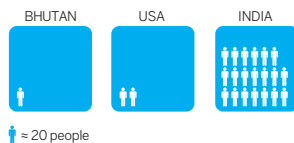
Explore soaring peaks and deep valleys, populated by a wide and fascinating biological diversity.

WILDLIFE & SANCTUARIES 246

The Bhutanese have a traditional reverence for nature and have set aside vast tracts of the country to conserve it.



population per sq km



Bhutan Today

Bhutan remains a unique and special country. For better or worse, the country has opened its doors and hearts to the outside world and joined the global community. There is now at least one mobile phone for every three Bhutanese and there are more than 45,000 registered vehicles (though there are still no traffic lights). The challenge ahead for the government is to bring the benefits of globalisation and capitalism to Bhutan without undermining the very things that Bhutanese cherish about their unique culture.

» Population: 699,847 (2009)

» Life expectancy: 66 years

» GDP: US\$2155 per capita (2009)

» Human Development Index ranking: 132 out of 182 countries

» Chilli production: 10,500 tonnes per year

Democracy & Parliament

In 2005 Bhutan's much-loved king announced that he would abdicate in favour of the crown prince and he set about drawing up the country's first ever constitution to prepare for democratic elections in 2008. This peaceful ceding of power in favour of a parliamentary democracy stood in stark contrast to that other Himalayan former monarchy, Nepal.

In March 2008 the world's eyes were focussed on this small mountain kingdom as its populace went to the polls. With royal encouragement this sparse population spread over a rugged country managed a remarkable 80% turnout. And the result was extraordinary and unpredicted – a landslide victory to one of the two contesting parties. The Druk Phuen-sum Tshogpa (DPT) party grabbed 45 of the 47 seats in the parliament's lower house, the National Assembly. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the other two seats; however, it lost its leader in the landslide.

Bhutan's shiny new parliament consists of the king or Druk Gyalpo, the upper house or National Council, and the aforementioned National Assembly. The **National Council** consists of 25 members, 20 of who each represent one of the *dzongkhags* (political districts) and there are five additional members nominated by the king. Interest-

Dos & Don'ts

» Do use the word *la* at the end of a sentence in either Dzongkha or English as a sign of respect, eg *kuzo zangpo la* (hello).

» Do bring a small gift if you are invited to a Bhutanese home, perhaps a bottle of wine or box of sweets.

» Do remove your shoes and hat upon entering the important rooms of a temple.

» Do leave a small offering of money on the altar of temples.

» Don't use your finger to point, especially at deities or religious objects; use an open hand with the palm up.

» Don't touch the crown of the head, for example of a young child; this is considered a special part of the body.

» Don't take photos inside any temples and don't embarrass your guide by asking to be the exception.