

Welcome to Bhutan

Bhutan is no ordinary place. It is a Himalayan kingdom with a reputation for mystery and magic, where a traditional Buddhist culture carefully embraces global developments.

Surprising Bhutan

Bhutan holds many surprises. It's a country where the rice is red and where chillies aren't just a seasoning but the main ingredient. It's also a deeply Buddhist land, where monasteries are part of the mainstream, and where giant protective penises are painted beside the entrance to many houses. While it visibly maintains its Buddhist traditions, Bhutan is not a museum. You will find the Bhutanese well educated, fun loving and vibrant.

Naturally Bhutan

When you visit Bhutan, you will become one of the few who have experienced the natural charm of the first country where Gross National Happiness is deemed more important than Gross National Product. By law, at least 60% of the country must remain forested for future generations. You will experience Bhutan's natural wonders firsthand when travelling the mountain passes – resplendent with rhododendron blossom in spring. Botanical riches and unique mammals and birds are protected in several national parks, and a mountain trek is one of the best ways to experience the Himalaya.

High-Value Tourism

The Bhutanese pride themselves on a sustainable approach to tourism in line with the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Firstly, to bust a myth: there is *no* limit to tourist visas. Visitors famously pay a minimum tariff of US\$250 per day, making it appear as one of the world's more expensive destinations. However, this fee is all-inclusive – accommodation, food, transport and an official guide are all provided. You don't have to travel in a large group and you can arrange your own itinerary. What you won't find is backpacker-style travel.

Shangri-La?

So why spend your money to come here? Firstly there is the amazing Himalayan landscape, where snowcapped peaks rise above shadowy gorges cloaked in primeval forests. Taking up prime positions in this picture-book landscape are the majestic fortress-like dzongs and monasteries. This unique architecture embodies Buddhist culture and sets the scene for spectacular tsechus (dance festivals). Then there are the textiles and handicrafts, outrageous archery competitions, high-altitude trekking trails, and stunning flora and fauna. If it's not Shangri-La, it's as close as it gets.



Why I Love Bhutan

By Lindsay Brown, Author

As a former conservation biologist, for me there's lots to love about Bhutan. The mountains are carpeted in diverse forests that sing with birds, and it's the opportunity to explore this relatively untouched corner of the Himalaya that keeps me coming back. A highlight of my recent trip was a pair of rufous-necked hornbills feeding right beside the road. Bhutan's Buddhist tradition of respect and reverence for nature plus its amazing festivals and engaging people are the headlines to a rewarding and complex story about a beautiful Himalayan kingdom with a unique outlook on progress.

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Above: Buddhist monks performing at the tsechu at Gangte Goemba (p103)