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

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A fascinating history steeped in myths and mysticism gave birth to this remarkable and unique country.

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

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

Bhutan Today

Bhutan remains a unique and special country, but 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 two Bhutanese and there are more than 63,000 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.

Best in Print

The Raven Crown (Michael Aris)

Definitive history of Bhutan's monarchy, lavishly illustrated with rare photographs.

The Hero with a Thousand Eyes

(Karma Ura) Historical novel based on the life of Shingkar Lam, a retainer who served in the court of the second, third and fourth kings of Bhutan.

The Circle of Karma (Kunzang Choden)

Story of a young woman's journey across Bhutan to find her destiny, revealing the rich detail of everyday life and ritual.

Bhutan: The Land of Serenity

(Matthieu Ricard) Superb coffee-table book that sensitively and strikingly reveals Bhutan at its most picturesque.

Married to Bhutan (Linda Leaming)

Engaging account of finding love and much more in Bhutan.

Best on Film

Travellers & Magicians (Khyentse Norbu)

Whimsical tale tackling the conflict of new and old, set along twisting mountain roads and in mysterious dark forests.

The Other Final (Johan Kramer)

Nicely crafted record of what happens when the world's bottom football (soccer) team, Montserrat, meets second from bottom, Bhutan.

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 focused on this small mountain kingdom as its populace went to the polls. With royal encouragement the 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 Phuensum 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. In 2013 it was time for the second election and, in a climate of economic uncertainty, the PDP was swept into power winning 32 seats to the DPT's 15.

Bhutan's parliament consists of the king (Druk Gyalo), the National Council (upper house) and the aforementioned National Assembly. The National Council consists of 25 members, 20 of whom each represent one of the *dzongkhags* (political districts) and there are five additional members nominated by the king. Interestingly, candidates for the National Council must not be members of a political party.

For the first and second elections, the National Assembly had 47 seats across the 20 *dzongkhags*. The constitution allows for adjustments to be made to the National Assembly as the population increases (to a maximum of 55 seats), and as the distribution of voters across *dzongkhags* changes.