



# bhutan

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### accommodation

Your accommodation will be clean and basic, yet comfortable. Standard hotels in Bhutan are mostly family-run properties that are considered approximately 3-star by international standards. Many are selected for our programmes due to their convenient location and friendly services. Very few hotels open their bookings in advance (approximately 5-6 months), most hotels will confirm bookings 60-75 days prior to travel dates. This is a common place practise and Wendy Wu Tours will always endeavour to find a suitable replacement if a hotel is unavailable. All hotels we use have private bathrooms and have air conditioning and/or a ceiling fan and bar/restaurant facilities. Few hotels have tea and coffee facilities available in your room, and in-room fridges/mini bars are limited. Please bear in mind that all levels of hotels can sometimes suffer from minor problems and technical difficulties (see Electricity). At each hotel your Guide will try to organise the rooming arrangements to suit everyone's requirements. If you are travelling as a couple please note that we cannot guarantee the availability of double beds.

### transport

**Road** – Time taken in getting from A to B in Bhutan is usually dependent on the size of your group. Roads in Bhutan are like our remote country roads, tarred but a single lane. Though marked as dual lanes, they are invariably the width of one and a half lanes; however there are continual road works to make the main highway a full dual carriage road. Most of the roads are also very windy and are cut into a cliff face, giving you a magnificent view of the scenery and mountains as you drive past. This means space to pass is scarce and although distances are not large, the time to travel these distances is a lot longer than it would take in Australia. This means that some days may be full of driving. Continual road works are also taking place in Bhutan, with rocks being extracted to be used in the Hydro Electric Power Stations that are under construction in Bhutan. A mid-range car or mini-van is used when travelling independently, depending on the size of your party. For group tours a mini-coach is used and your luggage is transported in a second vehicle. All vehicles are meticulously maintained and safety checked. Keep in mind that the vehicles do not have seatbelts or bathroom facilities. Though there are toilet stops at cafés and restaurants, some will be at 'bush toilets' en-route, hence it is a good idea to carry some toilet paper and hand sanitiser with you at all times.

**Air** – There is only one airport in Bhutan located in Paro. Druk Air, the National Carrier, is the only airline permitted to fly into Bhutan. Paro Airport can be subjected to adverse weather conditions and flight delays can be expected so it is recommended that you do not book connecting flights after disembarking from your Druk Air flight, it is advisable to leave a day between flights. All Druk Air flights travel via a secondary city to and from Paro.

### meals

All meals (excluding drinks) are included in all our advertised Bhutan packages. Bhutanese cuisine consists of steamed rice (red or white) served with spicy curries and can be vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Most hotels offer buffet-style meals including Continental, Chinese and Bhutanese food. All hotels and restaurants have a selection of international and Bhutanese drinks. Local beers including the national favourite 'Red Panda' are available and are considerably cheaper in local stores than at your hotel. Wine, however can be very expensive. As the majority of the accommodation is a family run business, breakfast consists of buffet-style or table service with both Western and local Bhutanese cuisine.

### water

It is not recommended that you drink the local tap water in Bhutan. Please always drink bottled water, including when brushing teeth. Bottled water is readily available to purchase in Bhutan as well as soft drinks. During touring you will be supplied with one bottle of water per day. Most hotels do not provide free bottled water so you need to ensure you have an adequate supply for each night.

### special dietary requirements

**Vegetarians** – Vegetarians will have plenty of options in Bhutan. However to ensure that this is the case please advise us if you are a vegetarian so that arrangements can be made for you.

**Food Allergies** – If you have food allergies or preferences, please make them known to your National Escort/Local Guide who will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met in advance. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee that special requirements can always be met, therefore it is advisable to bring your own snacks.

### haggling

Haggling is not as common in Bhutan as it is in neighbouring countries. At the markets and in some shops prices for souvenirs are negotiable, though you will find Bhutan is very expensive compared to India for the price of souvenirs, snacks and drinks. Ask your National Escort/Local Guide if prices are negotiable before engaging.

### pharmaceutical products

Take all pharmaceutical products that you may require on your tour; do not rely on being able to purchase these during your holiday. Consider taking a 'personal medical kit' containing any medication or medical equipment you may need during your time in Bhutan. Suggestions include: All prescribed medication (with a prescription, or cover note for any medical equipment you will carry, from your doctor), headache tablets, anti-diarrhoeal tablets, cold and flu tablets, travel sickness tablets, lozenges, insect repellent, sunscreen and anti-bacterial hand wipes or gel. You may need to consider motion and altitude sickness remedies due to the mountainous and winding roads.

### tipping

Tipping in the hotels is generally not expected. However it is customary to show your appreciation of good service in Bhutan towards your guides and drivers. Full details of the compulsory tipping amount for our group tours will be included in your final documents as this is based upon your length of travel and size of your group.

### weather

Bhutan's geography ranges from the sub-tropical southern border with India to steep slopes which climb to snow-capped Himalaya mountain peaks at the northern border with Tibet. During the months of March, April and May it is their equivalent to spring before the monsoon season and during the months of September, October and November it is their equivalent to autumn after the monsoon season – these months are the coolest and driest times of the year. The monsoon usually arrives in mid-June, with light rain falling mainly in the afternoons and evenings. The lower altitude coastal plains experience warm and humid weather with cooler evenings. The higher altitude mountainous areas are also at their most pleasant, although temperatures are significantly lower and there are occasional heavy rains. Remember that you are at a higher altitude, no matter the time of year; sudden and unpredictable drops in temperature, snow or storms can hit on the mountain passes. The sun is also much stronger so you can be sunburnt more quickly.

### photography

Wendy Wu Tours suggests asking permission before taking photographs of adults or children. It's a good idea to be prepared with a supply of smaller notes to show your appreciation of your willing subjects. We ask that you do not take pictures inside monastery's temples, Dzongs or government establishments, as this is considered disrespectful. Your guide will always be on hand to indicate when you cannot take photographs. Bhutan doesn't have the same standard of photography equipment available so please ensure you have enough memory for your cameras as access to extra cards and other equipment can be limited.

## safety & security

Bhutan is a very friendly and hospitable country however, as always when travelling please exercise caution especially at night. We ask that you carry your passport with you rather than leave it in your main luggage, as the support vehicle with your luggage on board may leave the hotel after you. Most hotels we use in Bhutan have in-room safes or safety deposit boxes, please utilise these when available to store your valuables for your own peace of mind.

## permit

All passengers travelling to Bhutan will require a permit to enter this unique kingdom. Wendy Wu Tours fully inclusive tours and independent packages visiting Bhutan are inclusive of the cost of this permit. In order to process this, we require a clear colour photocopy of your passport bio page no less than 60 days prior to your date of entry into Bhutan. Please ensure your passport has at least six months validity left from your arrival date back into Australia. Once processed, our partners in Bhutan will send the Bhutan Permit document to our office and we will pass this on to you. This is not your permit; it is just a document showing you have applied for one. **For independent travellers** a copy of the Bhutan Permit document is required before boarding your Druk Air flight or crossing overland into Bhutan. The actual permit will be stamped in your passport upon arrival in Bhutan, whether overland or upon arrival in Paro Airport.

## luggage

All passengers are limited to two (2) items of luggage each:

**One (1)** suitcase or backpack with a maximum weight of 20kg. Your main luggage must have a lock on it.

**One (1)** piece of hand luggage, with a maximum weight of 5kg. It is advisable that your hand luggage consist of a 'daypack' bag which you can access during the day and carry items like your camera, drinking water, toilet paper, hat, etc. For group tours your luggage will be carried separately from you in a support vehicle.

## money

**Local Currency** - Bhutan's unit of currency is the Ngultrum (BTN). The Indian Rupee is also an accepted form of currency as the Ngultrum is fixed against the Indian Rupee. You may be given change in either Indian Rupee or Bhutanese Ngultrum. Only notes under 100 Indian Rupee are accepted. Please note that Ngultrum is not available outside of Bhutan. 1AUD = 60BTN

**Changing Money, Credit Cards and ATMs** - Banks can be found in most cities and large towns where you will be able to exchange cash. Many hotels also offer currency exchange. If you are coming through to Bhutan from India, it is recommended you exchange your Australian money into Indian Rupees to use in Bhutan before you arrive. Do not rely on ATMs in Bhutan as they are generally only for local card holders. As tourism develops in the region this service may become more readily available and reliable. Major credit cards are only accepted in the larger hotels and established shops.

## keeping in touch

**Time difference** - Bhutan's time zone is +6GMT meaning they are 4 hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time.

**Phone** - The Bhutan phone system is fairly good and you will be able to make calls from your hotel at an additional charge. Phone booths are widely available except in remote areas.

To call Australia the international access code is 00, followed by the country code, 61 then the local area code (omitting the first 0) then the number. For example to call Wendy Wu Tours the number would be 00 61 2 9224 8888.

**Mobile Phones** - Mobile reception is generally good, however not all services providers are compatible with the local network. Please ensure global roaming is available with your service provider before departing Australia. If you wish to have mobile coverage and your phone is capable of changing SIM cards you can purchase one and continue to top up your charge at the many 'B Mobile' recharge stands/shops.

**Post** - International postage is inexpensive and takes approximately three to four weeks to reach its destination.

**Email** - Internet services are developing in Bhutan as the country accepts more foreign visitors. Most hotels have a business centre with computer and internet access available for a reasonable additional charge. Internet cafés are around but not abundant; please inquire with your National Escort/Local Guide.

## electricity

**Voltage**: Electricity runs on 220/240 Volts with circular two-pin and three-pin outlets. Please remember to bring adaptors with you as you may not be able to purchase them in Bhutan. Power cuts are common in more remote regions and occur occasionally in major cities too, despite hydroelectricity being the country's largest export.



European plug



UK plug

## insurance

It is a condition of travel that all customers have adequate travel insurance for the duration of their travel arrangements. If you have chosen to decline the insurance offered by your agent or Wendy Wu Tours please ensure you have arranged the appropriate cover for your holiday; overseas medical costs are expensive and Medicare or private health insurance will not cover you outside of your home country. Please inform our office of your travel insurance details. If you are taking out travel insurance with your credit card company, you will need to investigate the policy's inclusions and conditions fully. You should receive a policy number, an international access phone number to contact them in an emergency and a copy of full conditions. It is essential you inform your insurance company of all pre-existing conditions. All travel insurance providers require **you** to contact them ASAP and inform them of your situation in the unlikely event that you need hospitalisation, medical treatment, or to evacuate (change travel plans for medical reasons). They will then decide the best course of action in regards to further treatment and/or repatriation and make appropriate booking arrangements. You must check your policy for exact inclusions and procedures.

## health

Anyone travelling to a developing country should see a doctor beforehand. The Australian government's Smartraveller scheme advises people to visit either your GP or a travel vaccination centre, such as The Travel Doctor (T.M.V.C) to receive a health check and vaccination advice. For most people this should be 8 weeks before your holiday to allow time for any necessary vaccination.

## etiquette & customs

In most cases your Guide will brief you on etiquette; however there are a couple of good points which are worth noting.

- Bhutan's religion is a very traditional form of Buddhism and as such animals are not euthanised, even for humane reasons. As such you may see dogs and other animals in a condition where in our culture would have them put down or operated on. Dog overpopulation is a major problem.
- You should avoid pointing the soles of your feet at anyone. This may seem unlikely to happen but you could inadvertently do this while laying down or sitting with your feet up.
- You will see images and carvings which some would consider phallic, painted on the sides of buildings, hanging from eaves and in shops. The Bhutanese do not consider these to be as such but rather to bring good luck and as talismans against evil.
- National pride is very strong in Bhutan, with the King placing achieving national happiness above economic growth. The King has decreed all buildings must be built in the traditional style and all Bhutanese Nationals must wear traditional dress including their rank shawl to all Government buildings, schools and museums.
- In monasteries, temple and dzongs, always walk in a clockwise direction around places or objects; it is always a good idea to watch the behaviour of others. Do not point a finger at any sacred object. If you are unsure about how to behave please ask your National Escort/Local Guide.
- Smoking has recently been deemed illegal in Bhutan. Please be aware that smokers will incur a hefty 200% tax fee upon entry for any cigarettes being brought into the country. A receipt will be issued to you which you must keep on you at all times. Failure to adhere to these rules may result in fines and imprisonment.

## our ground operator

During your time in Bhutan your arrangements will be handled by our partner operators -

### Druk Travel Service

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*The content of this fact sheet was correct at the time of printing and may be subject to change.*