



Dear Kingdom Explorers,

You are all confirmed on the Druk Air flights from Bangkok to Paro on Nov 17 and returning Nov 24. You will receive a highly limited and highly desirable visa to visit the true Magic Kingdom!

Flights are confirmed on Druk Air as indicated. We have e-tickets and will travel from Bangkok. **Please note 20K weight limit. You can pay for excess weight at airport.**

17NOV

DRUK KB 123 DEP: 0720 ARR: 1100
BKK-SUVARNABHUMI PBH-PARO, BHUTAN

24NOV

DRUK KB 130 DEP: 1130 ARR: 1630
PBH-PARO, BHUTAN BKK-SUVARNABHUMI

As the days go by, we will be dreaming of those sacred mountains, and know that they will steal a place in your heart, as they have in mine. It is going to be an absolutely transformative trip, and I look forward to sharing some of these beautiful views with you all!

I've listed a lot of information about the country, so you may want to print and save some of these for reading while in-country. It may have more meaning, or make more sense when you are looking at birds and flowers and thunderbolts ;)

Banking and Currency

Bhutan's currency is the Ngultrum (Nu.) that is at par with the Indian rupee. It is recommended you carry travelers' cheque or cash, as ATM facilities for foreign currency is limited to just the capital city Thimphu.

Here's the info I received from Bhutan when asking about ATM:

"Referring to credit card ATM, Visa and Master card does work in Bhutan to withdrew money from any BOB ATM and also Amex card do work, if Master card logo are affix in front of card. However, without Mater card logo, it do not work. Your guest also have option of doing cash advance with our reception desk, but there will be 5% surcharge on top of cash advance on credit card"

I think this means we can get cash with a Mastercard, and it is not in relationship to Cirrus, Star or other bank network, as we are in the Magic Kingdom, right?



Financial institutions in Bhutan are the Bank of Bhutan Limited, the Bhutan National Bank, the Druk PNB and the Tashi Bank. Traveler's cheque can be easily exchanged into local currency. However, as you travel into the interior, facilities can be almost non-existent

Taking Bhutan Home

Bhutan is an ideal place and a frequent haunt for photographers offering immense opportunities for photography, however, check with your guide for taking photographs inside Dzongs, temples, monasteries and religious institutions. They are often restricted unless you have special permission from the Department of Culture. There is much to capture with the landscapes, panoramic views of mountain, rural folk life, flora and fauna, Bhutanese architecture, Dzongs and Chortens.

Bhutan offers exquisite handwoven textiles. Discover hand-woven raw silk, carved animal masks, woven baskets of cane and bamboo, wooden *Dapas* bowls, handmade paper or finely crafted silver. You can also find thangkha paintings and Bhutan's exquisite postage stamp. Please remember that buying and selling of antiques is strictly forbidden in Bhutan.

Gratuities

Tipping is a purely personal matter. Please give tips to your guides and drivers as you feel services are rendered. Since have several guides and drivers for the tour, you can give a tip at the end of the trip.

Customs

You have to complete the passenger declaration form on your arrival before checking out. 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. 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 clearance certificate.

Language

Bhutanese speak a variety of languages but Dzongkha is the national language and one of the most widely spoken language. Most Bhutanese speak some English, and communicating with people in urban areas and towns will enhance your experience in Bhutan.



Clothes & Packing

With great altitudinal variations, weather is erratic in Bhutan. Be prepared to brace the erratic weather as you step outdoor. Dress modestly and respectfully especially when visiting monasteries, Dzongs and other religious institutions. As a mark of respect, remove hats, caps etc. as you enter religious and administrative premises, institutions and any other place with the national flag raised.

Time

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

Food

Bhutanese cuisine uses significant amounts of Red Rice, one of the few varieties that grow at high altitude, along with buckwheat and maize. Soups and stews are spiced with chili peppers, and Zow shungo, is a rice dish mixed with leftover vegetables. The spicy ema datshi is made with cheese and chili peppers. and is referred to as the national dish due to the pride that Bhutanese have in it.

Popular snacks are momo (dumplings), shakam eezay and liver, butter and cheese from yak and cow's milk, and spices of cardamom, ginger, chili peppers, garlic, turmeric and caraway.

Bhutan food is generally know for it's simplicity, and mealtime is typically a relaxed time. Three meals a day is typical, and it is not unusual for all three meals to be rice and ema datse. At a hotel, cutlery is provided, but in a local café you may be limited to a spoon or your hand and bowl of rice to mop up the meal.

The food in a restaurant will probably be LESS spicy than if you visited someone's home. Chilies are in almost all Bhutanese dishes, and it has been said **"If it doesn't make you sweat, then why bother to eat it"**. In most cases salt and chili is the only spice, with a bit of saffron and curry. When you visit someone's house you will be offered food and it will have a kick to it. When offered food, say *meshu meshu*, covering the mouth with hands in refusal according to Bhutanese manners, and then give in on the second or third offer.

National Butterfly

Bhutan has a National butterfly, which I find really sweet, and wrote a blog about it [here](#)

National Parks & Nature Reserves

Bhutan is one of the few developing countries where much of the natural resources remains intact. The Kingdom is 1 of 10 bio-diversity hot spots in the world and 1 of 221 global endemic bird areas. Almost 3/4 of land is covered with forests that are natural habitual for diversity of flora and fauna. Its various eco-systems harbor some of the most exotic species of the



Himalayas, with 770 species of birds and 50+ species of rhododendron, along with an astonishing variety of medicinal plants (300+ species) and orchids.

National parks and wildlife sanctuaries are home to some of the rare and most significant animals in the world. This is a result of the Government and people keeping the country's flora and fauna undisturbed. The exact number of mammalian species is unknown but over 165 have been reported. Rare animals like the golden Langur, takin and snow leopard live in these mountains, along with tiger, leopard, elephant, red panda, gaur, serow, Himalayan black bear, brown bear, wild pig and musk deer. The Phobjikha valley in Wangdue Dzongkhag and Bumdiling in Trashigang are 2 of 3 wintering grounds for the rare black-necked cranes.

26 % of the country is nature parks and reserves, and another 9 % is set aside as biological corridors connecting protected areas. The corridors form a " Gift to the Earth" from the people of Bhutan. A Royal Society for Protection of Nature has been established which works with forest department and the World Wide Fund for Nature. (WWF)

National Flag

The national flag of Bhutan ལྷ་རྩལ་སྐྱིད་རྩལ་ཆ་ is one of the National Symbols of Bhutan. It is diagonally segmented and depicts a white dragon across the middle. The upper part is golden yellow, representing the power of the King, while the lower orange is indicative of Buddhist influence. The Dragon (Druk) represents Bhutan: the Druk-yul, Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon. The white Dragon represents the purity and loyalty of the people, and the jewel in its claws represents the wealth and prosperity of the country and people. The snarling mouth of the dragon expresses the strength of the male and the female protective deities of the country.

National Emblem:

The National Emblem, contained in the circle, is composed of a double diamond thunderbolt placed above a lotus, surmounted by a jewel and framed by two dragons. The double diamond thunderbolt represents the harmony between the secular and religious power, which results from the Buddhist religion in its Vajrayana form. The Lotus symbolizes purity; the jewel-sovereign power; and the two dragons, male & female stand for the name of the country- Druk Yul, the Land of the Thunder Dragon.

National Tree:

Cypress (Cypripedium corneyana), called Tsenden is associated with religious places. According to legend, this tree is believed to have grown from Guru Padmasambhava's walking stick.

National Flower: Blue Poppy (Mecanopsis Grandis), locally called Euitpel metog hoem, is delicate blue and purple tinged bloom with a white filament growing in higher altitude.



National Bird: Raven (*Corvus corax Tibetanus*). The tutelary god Mahakala took the form of a raven to guide the country's unifier Zhabdrung to Bhutan. Raven (Jarog) lent its name and features to the crown of the King of Bhutan.

National Animal

Takin locally called "Dong Gyem Tsey" is chosen as a national animal because of its uniqueness and its strong association with the country's religious history and mythology. It is a clumsy heavy animal similar to gnu and musk ox. It lives in flocks in places 4000m high and feeds on bamboo. It weighs as much as 250 kgs.

National Day

The 17th December is celebrated as National Day of Bhutan in commemoration of the accession of The First King of Bhutan Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuk to the throne in 1907 at Punakha Dzong.

National Anthem

Official in 1966 and roughly translated:

*In the Thunder Dragon Kingdom adorned with sandalwood,
The protector who guards the teachings of dual system,
He, the precious and the glorious ruler, causes dominion to spread,
While his unchanging person abides in consistency,
As the doctrine of the lord Buddha flourishes,
May the sun and peace of happiness shine on the people.*

National Sport

Archery, the national sport is played practically all year. Being a vital part of all festivities, it is usually accompanied by a banquet. Spectators marvel at the dexterity of the Bhutanese and gasp at members who stand close to the target and sidestep flying arrows with amazing speed.

Bows and arrows are made of special kind of bamboos. Two painted wooden targets 30 by 120cms are placed at each end of the range which measures 120m in length. The targets are used alternately. Two teams of 11 archers compete, each man shooting two arrows. The first team to get 33 points wins the match. There are 3 sets and the method of scoring is complicated because arrows landing within an arrow's length of the target also counts.

As we approach the departure date, make sure you have copies of all important documents, and have told your credit card companies that you will be travelling out of the country.

I'll keep sending more information as the weeks close in on take off to the Magic Kingdom! :)
Be well my fellow travellers and adventurers, and enjoy the changing pace of [Autumn!](#)

yoga Bloom