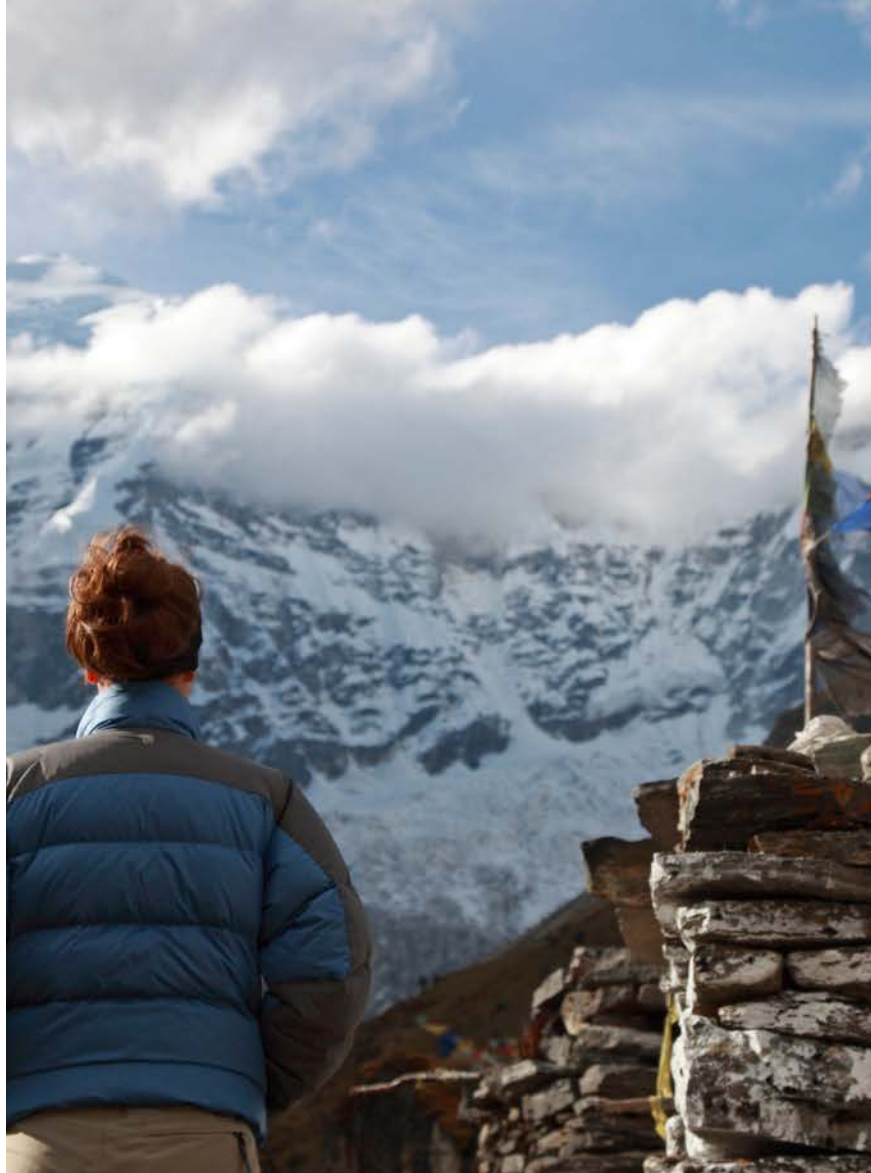


# BHUTAN



Premium Bhutan

DISCOVER THE MOUNTAIN KINGDOM

## BHUTAN: AN INTRODUCTION

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Bhutan was originally known by many names including Lho Jong (The Valleys of the South), Lho Mon Kha Shi (The Southern Mon Country of Four Approaches), Lho Jong Men Jong (The Southern Valleys of Medicinal Herbs), and Lho Mon Tsenden Jong (The Southern Mon Valleys where Sandlewood Grows).

Perhaps the most common and evocative name though, in Dzongkha (the national language) is 'Drukyul' - the Land of the Thunder Dragon.

Unified in the 17th century, Bhutan's first hereditary King was crowned in 1907, with His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck crowned as the first Druk Gyalpo ('Dragon King'). Then, following a century of peaceful rule, in 2008 Bhutan wrote into law its national Constitution and became a democracy in order to better protect the rights of its citizens. In November of the same year, the current reigning 5th Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was crowned.

## HOW MODERN BHUTAN BECAME...

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small, landlocked nation located in the southern foothills of the Himalayan mountain range, sandwiched between the giant land masses of Tibet & China in the north and India in the south. With a population of just under a million though, and a land mass roughly the size of Switzerland, Bhutan is a land full of its own splendid mystery, and proves the old adage that small is beautiful...





## GEOGRAPHY OF BHUTAN

Bhutan is a wonderfully diverse mix of flora and fauna, due to its 3 main altitude zones - all three with their unique ecosystems & beauty....

### **The Greater Himalayas of the North:**

The towering Himalayan mountains of Bhutan dominate the north of the country, where peaks can easily reach 7,000 metres (22,966 ft) above Sea Level. Some of the best-known peaks are Jiwuchudraky and Jomolhari. Permanent snow, glaciers and barren rock form the main features in this alpine region, with it also being home to the source of many of Bhutan's glacial rivers. At the lower edges of these peaks, where they meet the tree-line forests, you can also find explosions of colour in the form of small bushes of juniper and rhododendrons.

### **The Inner Himalayas:**

Rising continuously and with purpose from the lower foothills to a height of around 4,000m, this myriad of valleys is criss-crossed by the country's five major river systems and their tributaries, all of which ultimately drain down to the Brahmaputra River in India. Passes (called "La" in the national language Dzongkha) link this network of valleys, with some of the most famous being the Chele La (3,780m/12,402ft) - between the Haa Valley and Paro Valley, and the highest pass crossed by a Bhutanese highway. Then there is the Dochu La (3,116m/10,223ft) - the Lateral Road from the country's capital Thimphu to Punakha, which features 108 chortens (stupas) built to commemorate the expulsion of Assamese guerrillas. To the east lies the Pele La (3,390m/11,122ft), and other major passes including the Yotang La, Thrumshing La and Kori La (2,298m/7,539ft). Here at this altitude, the vegetation is a mixture of broad-leaved and coniferous forest with the conifer being the national symbol of strength & bravery.

**The Sub-Himalayan Foothills:** Stretched along the southern border of the country, the Duar Plain drops sharply away from the Himalayas into large expanses of sub-tropical forest, grasslands and bamboo jungle. The altitude of these southern foothills ranges from 200m at the lowest point to 2,000m, with the region being rich in dense & sub-tropical vegetation.

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loving people fond of song and dance, taking part in friendly archery contests, stone pitching, traditional darts, basketball and football. Weddings, religious holidays, and other events are used as the perfect opportunity to gather with family and friends, although Bhutanese people are known to visit friends and relatives at any hour of the day without any advance notice or appointment, whilst still receiving a warm welcome and hospitality.

While Bhutan is one of the smallest countries in the world though, its cultural diversity and richness are profound. The country's constitution guarantees freedom of religion and its citizens and visitors are free to practice any form of worship so long as it does not impinge on the rights of others.

Buddhism is the main religion of Bhutan, but Christianity, Hinduism and Islam are also commonly found.

## BHUTAN'S CULTURALLY DIVERSE PEOPLE

As a society, Bhutan is free of class and has no 'caste system' as is found in nearby India. Several organisations set up to empower women have been established in the past, but Bhutanese society has always maintained a relatively balanced gender equality, and its people open and good-spirited. There are accepted norms used to denote and show respect to ones elders and more senior, but the Bhutanese are a fun-



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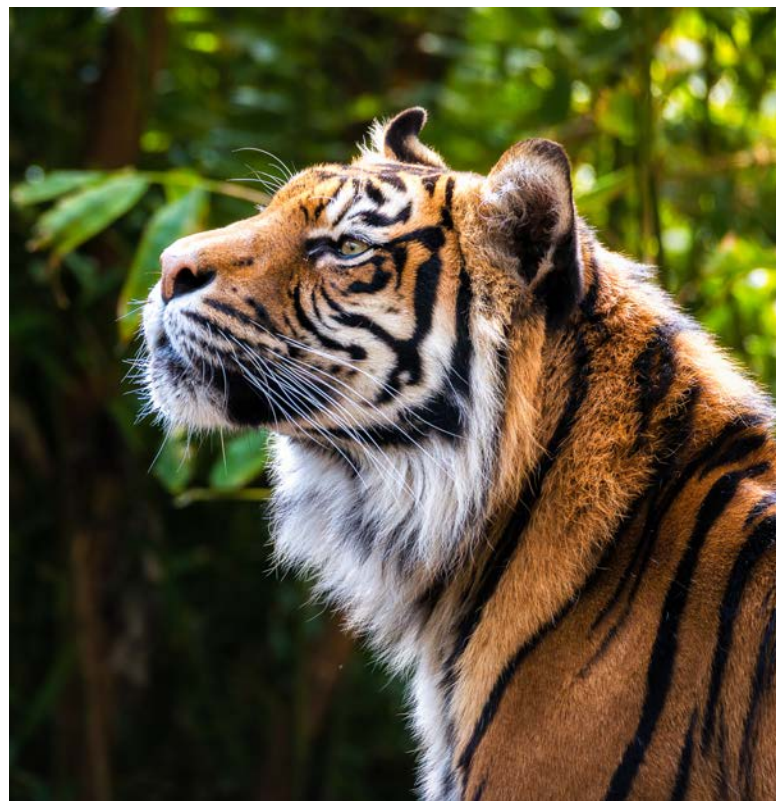
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- Bhutan's forest coverage ratio is legally required to remain at no less than 60% of the country's total land area, and is currently over 80%;
- Protected areas too, account for around 51% (16,396.4km<sup>2</sup>) of Bhutan's total land area, which includes 10 national parks & sanctuaries;
- The country's revolutionary climate change & environment protection policies have become a template for how to achieve sustainability globally. Bhutan's 11th Five Year Plan (2013-2018) sought to prioritise environmental management & reduction of greenhouse gas emissions & other pollutants;
- At the 15th COP in 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark, Bhutan declared its intention to remain carbon neutral. Today, the country has not only made good on that intention, but has maintained a carbon negative footprint, absorbing more carbon than it emits, with recent figures showing the country absorbed approx. 6MT of carbon dioxide annually, & releasing approx. 2.5MT.

## BHUTAN'S BEATING HEART - BIODIVERSITY

Bhutan's location and unique geographical & climatic variations mean that Bhutan is one of the world's top 10 biodiversity hotspots - and it has taken this responsibility seriously. In fact, Bhutan is one of the few countries that has enshrined environmental conservation in its Constitution, with examples of how this has been actioned including...



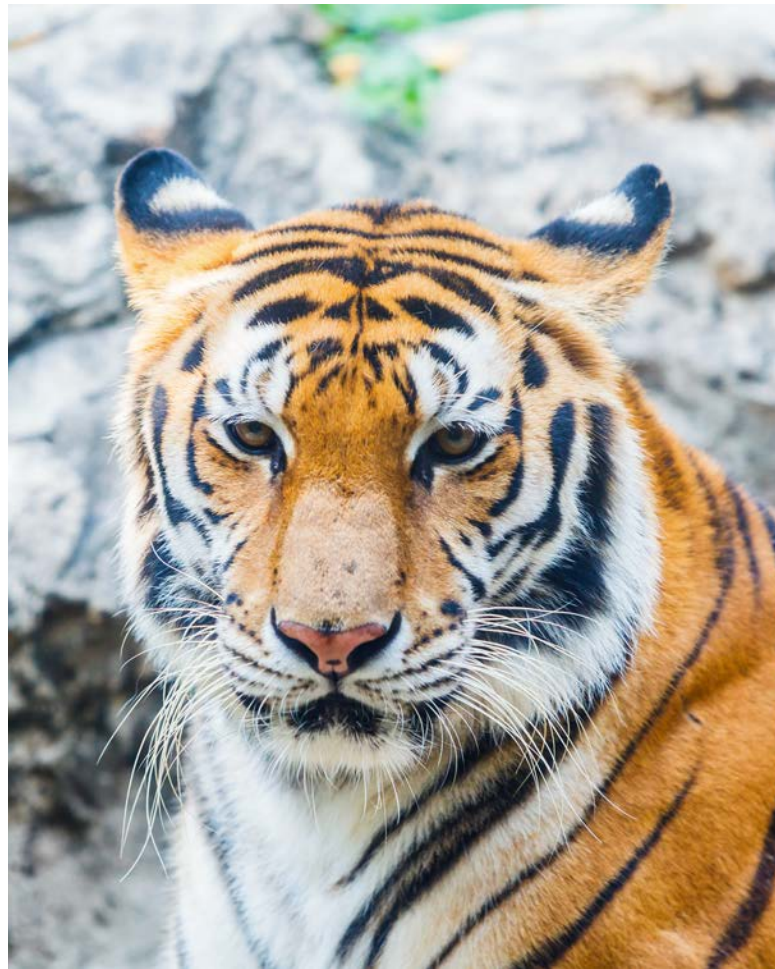
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Bhutan's pristine environment, with its rugged alpine regions and deep sweeping valleys, offers ecosystems that are both rich and diverse. The country's biodiversity is a key driver of the government's conservation efforts, and includes a wealth of flora & fauna...

**Flora:** Bhutan's array of flora and fauna is unparalleled - forests of fir including mixed conifers, blue pine, & long-leaf Indian pine, with broadleaf, upland hardwood, lowland hardwood, & tropical lowland forests to be found across the country's different climatic regions. In fact, almost 60% of all known plant species in the eastern Himalayan region can be found in Bhutan. Around 300 species of medicinal plants are found in Bhutan, 46 species of rhododendrons alone, as well as other flowering plants such as magnolias, junipers, orchids, gentian, Daphne, giant rhubarb, amongst many more.

**Fauna:** A wide range of rare & endangered animals can also be found frequenting the dense jungles and high mountains of Bhutan. The country's conservation efforts have ensured a largely unspoilt natural environment, able to support thriving populations of some of the rarest animals on earth and classified as one of the last biodiversity hotspots in the world. Rare high-altitude species such as the Snow Leopard and the Bengal Tiger can be found at altitudes between 3,000-4,000m, with Bhutan being the first country to have completed nationwide tiger and snow leopard surveys in pursuit of its commitment to international efforts to guide the conservation of these species. And the country's efforts seem to be paying off - recent government reports indicate healthy populations of both large cats and their prey. Other species including the Red panda, the Himalayan gorals, langurs, the Himalayan black bear, Sambar-, Barking-, & Musk Deer,



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wild pigs, & the Himalayan Blue sheep can all be found roaming their habitats. And in the country's southern tropical forests, you can encounter Clouded leopards, the One-Horned rhinoceros, elephants, water buffalo, & Swamp deer. Even the Golden langur - a species of monkey unique to Bhutan - can be spotted hanging out...

**Birds:** Birds too, can be found in abundance in Bhutan, and in great variety. Recognised as an area of high biological diversity and known as the East Himalayan 'hotspot' for birds, Bhutan is a hub for 221 global endemic bird areas. Over 670 species have already been recorded, with around 415 of these being resident in Bhutan. Whilst this number is expected to rise as new species and their presence are discovered, around 57% of Bhutan's globally threatened bird species and 90% of the country's rare bird species are dependent on the country's forest areas as 'altitudinal refugees'. Birds fly up & down the mountain ranges depending on the seasons & weather conditions. Approx. 50 species migrate during winter, including buntings, waders, ducks, thrushes & various birds of prey. Some 40 species are partial migrants, including swifts, cuckoos, bee-eaters, flycatchers, & warblers. Bhutan is also home to 16 globally endangered bird species, including the White-bellied heron, the Pallas Fish eagle & Blyth's kingfisher to name a few. Phobjikha Valley in Wangdue Phodrang is a crucially important location for the endangered Black Necked cranes.





Whilst Bhutan continues to be a leader in its environmental and sustainability efforts, it has also laid claim to perhaps one of the most innovative development measures in the world - that of 'Gross National Happiness', or 'GNH'.

Economists the world over have argued that the key to happiness is obtaining and enjoying material development, and whilst most countries measure their development along more conventional economic lines, with Gross Domestic Product ('GDP') and Gross National Product ('GNP') being the key metrics often cited, Bhutan takes a very different approach and advocates that amassing material wealth does not necessarily lead to happiness.

While emphasis is placed on both prosperity and happiness, it's the latter that is considered to be more significant, with Bhutan's king, His Majesty the 4th Druk Gyalpo proving the point by observing that 'the rich are not always happy while the happy generally considered themselves rich!' And so the concept of Gross National Happiness was born, based on the premise that true development in human society can only take place when material & spiritual development occur side by side, complementing & reinforcing each other. This development paradigm has also now made it possible for Bhutan to meet the development needs of even its most isolated villagers, while still focusing on the need to protect and preserve the country's rich tapestry of peoples, cultures, environment, and resources.

## AND FINALLY...

In Bhutan 'GNH' has replaced the concept of GDP - the country measures its progress not purely by economic achievement, but by its Gross National Happiness...



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