

AMANKORA

WHILE WE AWAIT YOUR JOURNEY TO BHUTAN

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# All About Bhutan

The name 'Bhutan' is a transcription of the Sanskrit 'Bhoṭa-anta' (भोट-अन्त, "end of Tibet"), a reference to Bhutan's position as the southern extremity of the Tibetan plateau and culture. In Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, Bhutan is called 'Druk Yul', which can be translated as Land of the Thunder Dragon. The total area of Bhutan is 38,394 square kilometers, comparable to the size of Switzerland. Bhutan is divided into 20 districts (dzongkhags) with Thimphu being the capital. Bhutan is neighboured by China in the North and India in the West and South. The current population is about 820,781 (2018).

## Formation of Bhutan

Until the early 17th century, Bhutan existed as a patchwork of minor warring fiefdoms, when the area was unified by the Tibetan lama and military leader Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who had fled religious persecution in Tibet. To defend the country against Tibet, Zhabdrung built a network of impregnable dzongs(fortresses).

During the 1870s, power struggles between the rival valleys of Paro and Trongsa led to civil war in Bhutan, eventually leading to the ascendancy of Ugyen Wangchuck, the penlop (governor) of Trongsa. Ugyen Wangchuck defeated his political enemies and united the country following several civil wars and rebellions during 1882-85. On December 17, 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck was unanimously chosen as the hereditary king of the country by an assembly of leading Buddhist monks, government officials, and heads of important families.



## The Bhutanese Flag

Divided diagonally, the flag has a white dragon across the middle. The white color is an expression of purity and loyalty and also represents the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. The dragon's growling mouth, which is an expression of the strength of many deities, protects the jewels that are held in his paws. These jewels represent prosperity, wealth and perfection. The upper yellow part of the flag represents the king's secular power. The lower orange part represents the spiritual power and religious practices of Bhutan's Mahayana Buddhist religion.





## A Brief History of Bhutan

Bhutan's recorded history begins in the 7th century AD, when Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo built the first Buddhist temples in the country—Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro and Jambey Lhakhang in Bumthang. In the 8th century, the revered Indian Tantric master Padmasambhava, known locally as Guru Rinpoche, introduced Tantric Buddhism, laying the spiritual foundation of Bhutan. He is venerated as the Second Buddha, particularly by the Nyingmapa school.

The following centuries saw both spiritual development and political obscurity, especially after the collapse of Tibetan central authority in the 9th century. A revival of Buddhism in the 11th century led to the rise of Tertons—spiritual treasure discoverers—who played a key role in Bhutan's religious heritage.

In the 17th century, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel unified the warring valleys of Bhutan into one nation—Druk Yul, the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon.' He established the dual system of governance and built many dzongs (fortresses), which served both religious and administrative purposes.

By the late 19th century, British interest in Bhutan led to tensions and conflict, culminating in the Duar War of 1864. The Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 restored peace, with Bhutan ceding the Duars in exchange for a British annual subsidy.

In 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck was elected as Bhutan's first hereditary king, marking the beginning of the Wangchuck dynasty. His successors continued to maintain Bhutan's sovereignty while gradually modernizing the country.

The third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, initiated Bhutan's first modern reforms and development plans, laying the foundation for today's infrastructure and institutions. Under his leadership, Bhutan joined the United Nations in 1971.

His son, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, became king in 1972 and is known for pioneering the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), emphasising sustainable development, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and good governance.

Today, Bhutan is led by His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who ascended the throne in 2006. Known for his deep connection with the people, he has continued the vision of his predecessors, focusing on education, youth empowerment, and the well-being of all Bhutanese. He remains a symbol of unity and progressive leadership in the Kingdom.



## Flora

Physically, Bhutan can be divided into three zones: the **Alpine Zone** (4000m and above) with no forest cover; the **Temperate Zone** (2000 to 4000m) with conifer or broadleaf forests; and the **Subtropical Zone** (150m to 2000m) with tropical or subtropical vegetation. Because of its wide altitudinal and climatic range, the flora and fauna are diverse and rich.

Except for Haa, which has a climate suited to livestock raising, western Bhutan is a land of rice paddies and orchards. These valleys are the domain of the Ngalong, ‘the first to rise’, meaning the first to convert to Buddhism. They speak Dzongkha, the ‘language of the dzong’, now the national language of Bhutan. The Black Mountains (5,000 meters) have traditionally marked the boundary between western and central Bhutan. The main road from Paro to Trashigang in eastern Bhutan crosses these mountains via the Pele La Pass (3,300 meters).

Forest types in Bhutan are Fir Forests, Mixed Conifer Forest, Blue Pine Forest, Chirpine Forest, Broadleaf mixed with Conifer, Upland Hardwood Forest, Lowland Hardwood Forest, and Tropical Lowland Forests. Almost 60% of the plant species found in the eastern Himalayan region can be found in Bhutan as well.

Known in ancient times as Menjong or ‘Land of Medicinal Herbs’, Bhutan boasts about 300 species of medicinal plants and about 52 species of rhododendrons. Some common sights for visitors are the magnolias, junipers, orchids of varied hues, gentian, medicinal plants, daphne, giant rhubarb, the blue poppy, which is the national flower, and tropical trees such as pine and oaks.

With almost 70% of its forests left intact, Bhutan is considered one of the world’s only carbon-negative countries.





## Fauna

A wide range of animals can also be found frequenting the jungles of Bhutan. Some high-altitude species include snow leopards and Bengal tigers, found at altitudes ranging from 3000 to 4000 meters, as well as red pandas, gorals, the langurs, Himalayan black bear, sambars, wild pigs, barking deer, blue sheep, and musk deer. In the tropical forests of Southern Bhutan, one can come across clouded leopards, one-horned rhinoceros, elephants, golden langurs unique to Bhutan, water buffaloes and swamp deer.

Bhutan also has a great variety of bird species. It is recognized as an area of high biological diversity and is known as the East Himalayan 'hot spot' due to being situated at the hub of 221 global endemic bird areas. The recorded number of bird species is over 670; 57% of Bhutan's globally threatened birds and 90% of the country's restricted rare birds are dependent on forests.

Bhutan has about 415 resident bird species. These inhabitant birds are altitudinal refugees, moving up and down the mountains depending upon the seasons and weather conditions. Around 50 species of birds that migrate in the winter are buntings, waders and ducks, thrushes, and birds of prey. Some 40 species are partial migrants, and they include species such as swifts, cuckoos, bee-eaters, flycatchers, and warblers.

Bhutan is also home to about 16 bird species that are endangered worldwide, including the white bellied heron, Pallas' fish eagle, and Blyth's kingfisher. Phobjikha Valley in Wangdue Phodrang and Bomdeling in Trashigang are also two important places in Bhutan that are visited by the endangered Black Necked Crane from mid-October to early March.

# Climate

Bhutan's climate is as varied as its landscape: in the southern plains the climate is tropical, while the central valleys are cool. The Himalayas have severe winters and mild summers. Temperatures vary according to elevation. Most of the central portion of the country experiences a cool, temperate climate year-round.

In the south, a hot, humid climate helps maintain a fairly even temperature range of between 15°C and 30°C year-round, although temperatures sometimes reach 40°C in the valleys during the summer.

The dry autumn and winter months (from September to mid-March) offer warm days with temperatures ranging from 12°-20°C (54-68°F). Cobalt blue skies can be enjoyed throughout the days in winter. Evenings and early mornings are cool with overnight temperatures often falling to freezing.

The spring season (mid-March to June) offers warmer temperatures of 16°-30°C (61°-86°F). Like the rest of the Indian subcontinent, Bhutan is affected by the summer monsoon. The monsoon season is from June to August, during which the country receives most of its rain. Temperatures are warm with 22°-26°C (72°-79°F). Afternoon showers dispel some of the heat, and temperatures fall to around 15°C (59°F) at night.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES IN EACH VALLEY (IN CELSIUS)

Valleys / Months	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Thimphu	-2° / 12°	1° / 14°	4° / 16°	7° / 20°	13° / 22°	15° / 24°	15° / 26°	14° / 25°	14° / 23°	10° / 21°	5° / 18°	-1° / 14°
Punakha	4° / 17°	7° / 19°	10° / 22°	13° / 26°	17° / 29°	20° / 29°	20° / 30°	20° / 29°	19° / 27°	14° / 26°	9° / 22°	6° / 19°
Gangtey	-1° / 13°	1° / 13°	4° / 16°	6° / 20°	11° / 21°	13° / 22°	15° / 25°	15° / 23°	14° / 22°	11° / 21°	6° / 19°	2° / 18°
Bumthang	-5° / 10°	-1° / 10°	4° / 16°	3° / 18°	9° / 21°	13° / 22°	13° / 24°	13° / 23°	12° / 21°	6° / 19°	-1° / 16°	-2° / 12°
Paro	-5° / 9°	1° / 13°	2° / 14°	4° / 17°	10° / 23°	14° / 25°	15° / 26°	14° / 25°	11° / 23°	7° / 18°	1° / 14°	-1° / 11°







## Religion

Religion has shaped the history of the nation and continues to play an important role in the life of god fearing and spiritual people. All over Bhutan, evidence of this can be seen in many religious monuments and symbols that have been erected. The air of spirituality is pervasive even in the urban centers where the spinning of prayer wheels, the murmur of mantras, and the glow of butter lamps in the houses are still important features of everyday life. Bhutan's religious sites and institutions are not museums, but the daily home of its people.

**Buddhism** was first introduced to Bhutan in the 7th century AD. Tibetan king Songtsän Gampo (reigned 627–649) ordered the construction of two Buddhist temples, at Bumthang and at Kyichu (near Paro). Buddhist saint Padma Sambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche) came to Bhutan in 747. Bhutan is the only Mahayana Buddhism Kingdom in the world, with Mahayana Buddhism as its official religion. It is practiced throughout the entire country by 75% of the inhabitants.

**Hinduism** is Bhutan's second religion, practiced by about 22% of the population. Hinduism is most prevalent in the southern regions of Bhutan. 2% practice folk religion, and the other 1% follow other religions.

Before Buddhism captured the heart of Bhutan, several forms of **animistic religions** were practiced. The sun, moon, sky, and other natural elements were worshipped, and doctrine was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Those beliefs influenced popular Buddhism, infusing it with an appreciation for omens and demons felt to influence daily life profoundly. Minority groups still practice these traditions and rituals in some parts of the country.





## Demographics

Bhutanese people primarily consist of the **Ngalops** and **Sharchops**, called the Western Bhutanese and Eastern Bhutanese, respectively. The Ngalops primarily consist of Bhutanese living in the western part of the country. Their culture is closely related to that of Tibet. Much the same could be said of the Sharchops, the dominant group, who originate from the eastern part of Bhutan (but who traditionally follow the Nyingmapa rather than the official Drukpa Kagyu form of Tibetan Buddhism).

The **Lhotshampa**, meaning ‘southerners’, are a heterogeneous group of mostly Nepali descent. In modern times, with improved transportation infrastructure, there has been much intermarriage between these groups.

Bhutan is linguistically rich, with over **24 dialects** being spoken in the country. This can be attributed to the geographical disposition of the country, with its high mountain passes and deep valleys that contributed to their survival. The national language is **Dzongkha**, which is the native language of the Ngalops of western Bhutan. Its script is identical to classical Tibetan. There are numerous **other dialects** spoken throughout Bhutan in the various Dzongkhags or regions, most notably Sharshop in the East. In the schools, **English** is the medium of instruction, and Dzongkha is taught as the national language. For this reason, English is widely spoken in Bhutan.





## Culture

### National Dress

The national dress for Bhutanese men is the *gho*, a knee-length robe tied at the waist by a cloth belt (*kerā*). Women wear an ankle-length dress, the *kira*, which is clipped at the shoulders with two identical brooches called the *koma* and tied at the waist. The *wonju*, a long-sleeved blouse, is worn underneath the kira. A long-sleeved jacket-like garment, the *toego* is worn over the kira. The sleeves of the wonju and the toego are folded together at the cuffs, inside out. To strengthen Bhutan's identity as an independent country, Bhutanese law requires all Bhutanese government employees to wear the national dress at work and all citizens to wear the national dress while visiting schools and other government offices.

### Architecture

Bhutanese architecture remains traditional, employing rammed earth and wattle and daub construction methods, stone masonry, and intricate woodwork around windows and roofs. Traditional architecture uses no nails or iron bars in construction. A characteristic of the region is a type of castle fortress known as the dzong.

### National Sport

Bhutan's national sport is archery. The relatively small targets are cut from wood and brightly painted, usually measuring about 3 feet (91 cm) tall and 11 inches (28 cm) wide. Traditionally, Bhutanese bows are made of bamboo, and arrows from bamboo or reeds, fletched with feather vanes. In Bhutanese archery, the targets are placed 140 meters apart, whereas the Olympic standard is 50 meters.

Darts (*khuru*) is an equally popular outdoor team sport, in which heavy wooden darts pointed with a 10 cm nail are thrown at a paperback-sized target 30 to 40 meters away.







## Cuisine

### Food

Although adherents of Buddhism, the Bhutanese are not vegetarians and eat beef, especially in western Bhutan. Pork, poultry, goat, yak meat, and fish are consumed on a limited scale. Rice (especially the red rice), buckwheat, and maize are the staples of Bhutanese cuisine. Despite a scarcity of milk, dairy products, such as yak/cow cheese and their by-products, are part of the diet of the upland people. *Ema datshi*, made with spicy cheese and chillies, might be called the national dish for its ubiquity and the pride that the Bhutanese have for it. Meat soups, rice or corn, and curries are lavishly spiced with chillies, and it is common to see bright red peppers drying on rooftops in the sun.

Chewing *dma* (betelnut and leaf) is a popular part of Bhutanese tradition and is offered as a customary gesture of greeting. It is easy to recognize the lovers of this nut as it leaves a red stain on the lips and teeth.

### Non-alcoholic Drinks

Indian style sweet milky tea (*ngaja*) is widely available and may be served in a pot. Salted butter tea, or *suja*, is served during all social occasions, which may taste different to the Western palate.

### Alcoholic Drinks

Bhutanese are fond of alcoholic drinks prepared locally, known as *ara*, brewed from rice, wheat, and barley. *Ara* is also used as part of the offering while performing ceremonies on different occasions. There are two local beers brewed in Bhutan: The Red Panda, an unfiltered wheat beer bottled in Bumthang, and the Druk Lager and Druk 11,000, a fortified beer with a higher level of alcohol and Bhutanese beer manufactured by Namgay Artisanal Brewery. There are also several brands of locally produced spirits such as whiskey, rum, and gin.



## Gross National Happiness

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) was introduced in 1972 by the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. It signaled his commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's unique culture based on Buddhist spiritual values. While conventional development models stress economic growth as the ultimate objective, the concept of GNH claims to be based on the premise that true development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other. GNH was designed in an attempt to define an indicator that measures quality of life or social progress in more holistic and psychological terms than only the economic indicator of gross domestic product (GDP).

The four pillars of GNH are promotion of sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance.

The Gross National Happiness Index is a single-number index developed from 33 indicators categorized under the nine domains.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more about the four pillars of Gross National Happiness and the work of the GNH Centre in Bhutan.



## LOCATION MAP









## Getting There

Paro lodge is a 30-minute drive from the Paro International Airport. International flights are available from:

Kathmandu	1 hour 15 minutes
Dhaka	1 hour 10 minutes
Kolkata	1 hour 15 minutes
New Delhi	2 hours 20 minutes
Bangkok	3 hours 15 minutes
Singapore	6 hours 15 minutes
Dubai	4 hours 30 minutes
Hong Kong	8 hours 18 minutes





## Flying to the Roof of the World

Home to the world's highest peaks, the Himalayas rightly hold the distinction of being the Roof of the World, and arriving here by air is an experience not to be missed. Flying over snow-covered peaks, green valleys, glacier-fed rivers, and landscapes dotted with distinct architecture found nowhere else, a flight to Bhutan's international gateway in Paro and its domestic airport in Bumthang will reward one with not just scenic vistas but incredible aerial maneuvers that are legendary in the aviation industry.

Whether by airplane or by helicopter, flying to, from, and around Bhutan is an adventure of its own, and a unique part of every visit to this 'Kingdom in the Clouds'.



## AIRLINES

Bhutan Airlines and Druk Air are the only two international carriers allowed to operate to and from Bhutan. Druk Air is the only carrier that operates domestic flights between the domestic airports in the country.

Due to its unique terrain and Himalayan setting, private jets are not allowed to land in Bhutan unless accompanied by a pilot who is licensed and trained to land at Paro International Airport.

## AIRPORTS

Paro International Airport (PBH) is the only international airport and gateway to and from Bhutan. Amankora Paro is only 17 km away from the airport, while Amankora Thimphu is 50 km away.

Bathpalathang Airport (BUT) is the domestic airport servicing Bumthang. Amankora Bumthang is only 4 km away from the airport, while Amankora Gangtey is 145 km away. International flights do not arrive in Bumthang, and private jets are not permitted to land at this airport.

## ALTITUDE SICKNESS

As all five of our lodges lie between 1200 and 3000m only, it is rare for guests to suffer from altitude sickness, as heavy or more severe symptoms of this usually occur over 3000m. If you have suffered from prior episodes of this condition, we suggest that guests review our altitudes with their medical specialist to consider altitude sickness prevention medication, especially if they are planning to embark on hikes and treks at altitudes 3000m above sea level or higher.



## BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE

Bhutanese passport holders and any other nationals working as regular employees in Bhutan and residents in the country arriving with baggage shall be permitted to bring in personal items up to the assessed value as mentioned below without payment of duties and taxes:

Cigarettes: 200 sticks, 50 pieces of cigars and 250g of other tobacco products subject to 100% Customs Duty and 100% Sales Tax.

Spirits: 2 bottles, each bottle not larger than one litre.

Perfume: 1 bottle, not larger than 2 ounces.

Gold: 50g/ Silver: 1kg.

Clothing items: A maximum of 10 pieces of each type of clothing, whether stitched or unstitched.

Other household or personal goods, including electronics and bedding, shall be limited to one piece each.

Items of gifts and presents shall be included in the above free allowance.

Goods exceeding the above limit shall attract customs duty, even if the value of the goods is less than US\$1,000.

Goods imported in commercial quantities shall not be covered under the free baggage allowance.

Free baggage allowance shall not be eligible for passengers below the age of 15 years.

### **International routes:**

Your free baggage allowance is 30 kgs for Economy class and 40 kgs for Business class.

### **Domestic routes:**

Your free baggage allowance is 20 kgs for Economy class and 30 kgs for Business class.

An infant under 2 years of age and not occupying a seat is not entitled to baggage allowance.

To comply with the security regulations, passengers may carry only one hand baggage. Its sum of three dimensions (length, breadth and height) should not exceed 100 cm, and the weight should not exceed more than 5 kgs for Economy class and 7 kgs for Business Class.

Goods exceeding the above limit shall attract customs duty, even if the value of the goods is less than US\$1,000. Goods imported in commercial quantities shall not be covered under the free baggage allowance.

Note: A tourist can bring US\$10,000 or equivalent without declaring. If the amount exceeds US\$10,000, it must be declared at customs.

## AMANKORA

Amankora is a collection of five lodges located in five valleys across the Kingdom of Bhutan

Lodge	Elevation	No. of Rooms	Open Date
Paro	2250m (7382ft)	24 suites	June 2004
Punakha	1300m (4265ft)	12 suites	Aug 2005
Thimphu	2350m (7709ft)	16 suites	Dec 2005
Gangtey	3000m (9842ft)	08 suites	Nov 2005
Bumthang	2580m (8464ft)	16 suites	Oct 2007

Across the five lodges, Amankora's 76 suites fuse contemporary design with rustic materials to create a sleek yet convivial atmosphere. Open-plan bedrooms and living rooms have king-size beds, window seats, and traditional bukhari wood burners. Ensuite bathrooms, clad in terrazzo, centre on a large freestanding bathtub. Each suite can accommodate a maximum of 3 adults per room, or 2 adults and 1 child.

Room size: 52 square meters

Mo Chhu Suite in Punakha: 92 sq meters (Living room 40 & suite 52)

## AUDIENCE WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY

If you are seeking to have a private audience with Their Majesties or members of the Royal Family of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Royal Protocol forbids us from making and arranging such requests.

To arrange anything of this nature, a request would need to be addressed to the nearest Bhutanese embassy or consulate, with the request then forwarded on to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## BATHROOM AMENITIES

The following amenities are available in all suites across the five Amankora lodges:

Shampoo, Conditioner, Shower Gel and Body Lotion  
Shower Caps  
Cotton Wool  
Hair Dryer  
Bedroom Slippers  
Bathrobes  
Drinking water-bottled water available throughout the journey  
Ashtray & match

## BED SIZES

### Double Bed

Length – 200 cm | Breadth – 200 cm | Height – 20 cm

### Single Bed

Length – 200 cm | Breadth – 100 cm | Height – 20 cm

### Extra Bed

Length – 200 cm | Breadth – 100 cm | Height – 20 cm for Adults & 10 cm for children



## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Bhutan has four distinct seasons, and each season has its own beauty and charm. Bhutan is a year-round destination, so it is entirely up to you to decide your travel period. Festivals and special religious celebrations also unfold all throughout the year around the different areas of Bhutan, but their dates change annually, as dictated by the local astrological and lunar calendar. Kindly check at least 2 months prior to your planned visit to Bhutan for the final festival dates.

Due to the variable nature of the Himalayan terrain, weather in Bhutan can be unpredictable. Besides the monsoon rains in summer, rain can also occur in late spring and early-mid autumn. While no forecast can be guaranteed, we are confident that guests will enjoy their time in the Kingdom, filled with unforgettable experiences and any showers encountered will only enhance the beauty of Bhutan's lush, scenic landscapes.

**Spring (March, April & May)** Spring is a botanist's delight as various flowers start to bloom. and plants start budding after their long dormancy in winter. Flowers such as rhododendron, wild azaleas, and edelweiss cover the meadows like a carpet and add a new sense of wonder to Bhutan's landscape.

**Summer (June, July & August)** An abundant time of the year when flowers are in full bloom and valleys are covered in green. Weeping willows sweep the banks of many of the rivers and pine forests glisten in the sun, full of pinecones ready to plummet to the ground.

**Autumn (September, October & November)** This is the time when the entire landscape turns into a golden color. The farmers harvesting their crops in the golden colored paddy fields under the crisp blue skies is an amazing fragment of Bhutan's landscape in the autumn season.

**Winter (December, January & February)** Winter has its moments. The days are full of sunshine, while evenings can turn chilly. Soft turfs of clouds drape lazily over mountain tops as if waiting for new life to blow them across the landscape. The winter season in Bhutan gives one a clear view of the world's highest Himalayan mountain ranges covered in snow.

## BLACK-NECKED CRANES

Black necked cranes (*Grus Nigricollis*) are rare, endangered birds from the Tibetan Plateau that come to Bhutan to roost from early November until February. A few of them settle in Bumthang, but the majority of them flock to Gangtey, where a colourful local festival is held to celebrate their arrival every 11<sup>th</sup> of November.

## CAR SICKNESS

Car travel is a very important aspect of your journey between the lodges, sights, and valleys of Bhutan. If you are prone to car sickness, anticipate some issues on our Himalayan roads. The front seat is the best option to begin your travel. It is often the anticipation of car sickness that delivers one right into the queasiness, and if that anxiety of motion sickness is taken away, they are fine. Candied ginger is also a good standby to keep the tummy still, and if guests would like, we can make a nice ginger-hot water infusion to be taken along the drive, as this has proven helpful for other guests.

## CHECK-IN & CHECK OUT

The standard check-in time is 2pm and the check-out time is noon. Check out after noon but before 6pm is charged at 50% off the contract rates. A full day room charge is applicable for check out after 6pm. However, any request for late check out, either on a paid or complimentary basis, is subject to availability and at the discretion of the Amankora management.



## CLOTHING

With Bhutan's varying elevation, temperatures might change dramatically when traveling from one valley to another, regardless of the season. We suggest bringing casual touring clothes throughout, even for dinner. With some daytime temperatures warm enough for a shirt in spring and summer but dropping low at night, we suggest a good fleece pullover or similar and a hat for the sun. No need for hiking boots unless planning a serious trek, though a good pair of trainers is advisable.

During autumn and winter, we suggest a good winter down jacket with a layer of fleece or similar, a turtleneck or two, gloves, and a warm hat. All must be easily added on or taken off as you pass through various valleys and over passes as related to the time of day.

## TEMPLE ETIQUETTE

When visiting temples and monasteries in Bhutan, dress modestly by wearing long pants or skirts and sleeved tops. Remove shoes, hats, and sunglasses before entering. Always act respectfully-speak quietly, walk clockwise around sacred sites, and avoid touching religious objects or taking photos.

## CONFERENCE HALL

Two meeting rooms are available in Amankora Paro and Thimphu. The meeting room in the Paro lodge can accommodate up to 40 guests standing and 30 seated, while the Library in the Thimphu Lodge can be reconfigured as a multi-use event space, accommodating up to 32 guests seated or standing. Both have overhead projectors, audio systems, whiteboards and flipcharts available.

## CORKAGE FEE

Amankora charges US\$35++ for wines and US\$40++ for spirits brought into the lodge, charged when served in the dining or public areas. No charge if guests take in their own suites.



## COMMUNICATION

Before leaving your home country, please check with your mobile network carrier if they support roaming services in Bhutan. Kindly inform the lodge management or your guide if you wish to purchase a local SIM card upon your arrival. Bhutan's international call code is +975. All phones in your suites in Amankora can support international calls, but charges apply.

## CREDIT CARDS

Amankora accepts all major credit cards, but only a very limited number of shops around Bhutan accept them, preferring cash.

## CURRENCY

You will only be able to obtain the local currency, the Bhutanese Ngultrum, once here and should only need to exchange for a small amount. US dollars are widely accepted as well. Currency exchange is available at the airport, in some areas around Bhutan, and in all Amankora lodges.

The Bhutan Bank will NOT accept the following types of US Dollar notes:

- Notes from the 1996 series
- Notes from the 2006 series
- White notes
- Folded notes
- Any notes that are stained (even the smallest dot), worn, torn, defaced, or contain any writing
- INR 500 & 1000 notes

To ensure a smooth transaction, please use clean, crisp, and newer series US Dollar notes.

## DIETARY PREFERENCES & RESTRICTIONS

Vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options are readily available in all Amankora lodges. Guests with allergies or dietary sensitivities are requested to inform the Reservations Team in advance so arrangements can be made. Religious dietary requirements such as Kosher, Halal, or Hindu may also be accommodated, depending on the availability of specific ingredients, and should be discussed with the team before arrival.

## DRONES

Bringing drones and flying them is prohibited by the Civil Aviation Authority and the Royal Government of Bhutan. If you are bringing a drone with you, it might get confiscated at the airport upon arrival.

## ELECTRICITY

In Bhutan, the standard voltage is 230V and the frequency is 50Hz. You can use your electric appliances here if the standard voltage in your country is between 220-240V (as is in the UK, Europe, Australia, and most of Asia and Africa). Power plug adapters are available in the lodges upon request.

## GYM

We do not have gyms in our lodges, as with the extensive activities available in the outdoors, we anticipate our guests taking advantage of the trekking, hiking, and mountain biking. Should you wish to use a gym or a fitness centre, our team can arrange access to local gyms nearby.

## INTERNET

Internet is available in all our lodges, and a guest computer is available for use in each lodge. A portable internet device can also be requested for mobile connectivity while on the road.

## LAUNDRY

Laundry is complimentary and unlimited. The hotel will take care of the laundering for you, and we can do this overnight if requested, so there is no need to pack heavily. Dry cleaning is not available at the lodges but can be arranged when available in the area at extra cost.



## MEDICAL EMERGENCY

For most minor medical and health emergencies, all tourists visiting Bhutan are entitled to free medical care in government clinics, hospitals, and facilities. Private clinics are also available in Thimphu for an additional cost, and Amankora also has an on-call doctor (subject to availability) for guests requiring immediate assistance for any health issues or emergencies that might arise during their stay.

## MEDICINE

Large pharmacies stocking a wide range of medicines and prescription drugs are present in Paro and Thimphu, while smaller pharmacies can be found in most major towns and valleys around Bhutan. We suggest you bring with you an ample amount of medicine and specialized prescription drugs that you might need during your journey.

## PETS

Due to the change in altitude, we encourage guests to think carefully about the welfare of their pets before bringing them to Bhutan. Guests should contact the first carrier airline for the necessary arrangements for the onward journey, and proper documentation and paperwork should be obtained before the journey. Amankora is pet-friendly and also has a family of dogs in all five lodges.

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

Bhutan is a photographer's delight, and a multitude of opportunities abound for photos and videos. Outside temples and holy sites, one can freely capture their beauty and uniqueness, but inside the temples and inner sanctums where religious ceremonies are held, photography is strictly prohibited, and some even require guests to leave their phones and cameras behind before entering. When photographing people, it is always polite to ask first.



## REFUNDS & CANCELLATIONS

For refunds and cancellations, kindly check the details on your confirmation letter, or you can check directly again with our Reservations Team at Amankora. We do recommend travel insurance be taken.

## SHOPPING

Antiques, historical artifacts and most religious items are not allowed to be brought or shipped out to Bhutan. For objects of deep cultural and religious significance bought in Bhutan such as sculptures, furniture, silverware and thangka paintings, you need to ask the shop, dealer or gallery where you purchased the item to issue for you receipts and paperwork that will need to be submitted to the Ministry of Culture for clearance and a certificate which needs to be issued at least 2 days before your flight.

All items purchased in the Aman Shops can be handled and cleared for you by our lodge team and can also be shipped to your home upon request.

## SINGLE TRAVEL

Traveling alone is safe and an enjoyable experience in Bhutan. A dedicated driver and a guide will be with you every step of the way on your journey, and the team at Amankora is always on hand to keep you company. While exploring the urban areas of Paro and Thimphu on your own is totally fine and an interesting experience, going on hikes and nature walks alone is strongly discouraged, as getting lost is probable in most unmarked trails, and some wildlife is active in remote areas.

## SMOKING / CIGARETTES

Bhutan is the first country in the world to have banned the sale of tobacco under its Tobacco Act of 2010. Visitors are asked not to smoke in commercial centres; institutions, public gatherings (ie, festivals) or on public transportation. All foreigners are allowed to bring with them up to 200 sticks of cigarettes, 50 pieces of cigars, and 250g of other tobacco products for their personal consumption as per the existing policy. Please note that all cigarettes will be subjected to 100% customs duty and 100% sales tax. Travelers must declare their dutiable items at customs and pay taxes on arrival at Paro Airport.

## SPECIAL OCCASIONS

When traveling to Bhutan for a special day or milestone, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and more, kindly let our team at Amankora know beforehand so we can suggest memorable activities, blessings, ceremonies, or celebrations for you and your loved ones.

## STANDARD TIME / TIME ZONE

Bhutan is +6 hours GMT, 30 minutes ahead of India, one hour behind Thailand, and 2 hours behind Singapore.

## SWIMMING POOL

The Amankora Punakha Lodge, at only 1,200 meters above sea level, is blessed with warmer weather throughout the year. The lodge is set with its own heated outdoor infinity swimming pool overlooking the lush rice fields, mountains, and the Mo Chhu River. The pool, open from 7am to 10pm daily, is 1.4m deep, 5.25m in width, and 28.5m in length.

## SUGGESTED READING

If you are interested to learn more about Bhutan and life in the Himalayas, the following materials are suggested:

Bartholomew, Terese Tse & Johnston, J.  
The Dragon's Gift, the Sacred Arts of Bhutan

Bean, Susan S. & Myers, Diana K.  
From the Land of the Thunder Dragon, Textile Arts of Bhutan

Berthold, John  
Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon

Choden, Kunzang  
The Circle of Karma, a Novel (first Bhutanese novel by a woman)

Crossette, Barbara  
So Close to Heaven - The Vanishing Buddhist Himalayan Kingdoms

Grewal, B.  
Photographic Guide to Birds of the Himalayas

Grimmett, Richard & Inskipp, Carol & Tim  
Birds of India (as well as Bhutan and Nepal)

Harding, Sarah  
The Life & Revelations of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521)

Hellum, A. K.  
A Painter's Year in the Forests of Bhutan

Hickman, Katie  
Dreams of the Peaceful Dragon

Leaming, Linda  
Married to Bhutan / A Field Guide to Happiness: What I Learned in Bhutan about Living, Loving, and Waking Up

Riccard, Matthieu  
Bhutan, the Land of Serenity (a monk & French interpreter for the Dalai Lama)

Wangchuck, Ashi Dorji Wangmo (Queen of Bhutan)  
Treasures of the Thunder Dragon, A Portrait of Bhutan (her Majesty's vivid description of history & folklore)

Wangchuck, T. Sangay  
Seeing with the Third Eye, Growing up with Angay in Rural Bhutan (superb overview of Bhutanese beliefs & culture)

Wehrheim, John  
Bhutan, Hidden Lands of Happiness

Zeppa, Jamie  
Beyond the Sky & the Earth, a Journey into Bhutan

## SUGGESTED VIEWING

Travellers and Magicians • Khyentse Norbu • The first feature shot on location in Bhutan, this film, directed by a respected lama, follows a young official on his odyssey across the country.

Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom • Pawo Choyning Dorji • Bhutan's first Oscar-nominated film tells the story of an aspiring singer dreaming of relocating to Australia, who suddenly finds himself assigned as a teacher in Lunana - one of the world's most remote villages.





## TAXES AND FEES

The Amankora room rates exclude the following taxes and fees:

- 10% Government Tax and 10% Service Charge
- Sustainable Development Fee: USD 100 per person per night
- Visa Fee: USD 40 per person, one-time visit
- Sustainable Tourism Fund: USD 10 per person, one-time visit

## TIPPING

Your itinerary costs carry a service charge component. However, if you believe the service has been beyond expectations and wish to leave something behind for those who are most deserving, the amount is really at your discretion.

## TRANSIT IN BANGKOK

The check-in counter opens 3 hours before departure and closes 1 hour prior. Upon arrival at Bangkok (BKK) Airport, follow the signs for “Transfer Desk” or “Connecting Flights”, then proceed through a security check. Keep your travel documents ready, as this is a standard procedure for transit passengers.

For luggage transfer on arrival, you must request the arriving airline to interline or check through the baggage to Paro, as it will be the responsibility of the arriving airline to check through the baggage to the next destination.

### **Luggage Transfer Instructions for Bhutan Departures:**

If you have connecting flights and your baggage needs to be checked through to your final destination, please inform the check-in counter before handing over your luggage. Note that baggage check-in through to the destination is only available with participating airlines.

At your transit airport, it is essential to reconfirm your baggage status at the transit counter before proceeding to your onward flight. The staff will confirm whether your baggage has been successfully transferred and tagged for your destination.

Please ensure a minimum transit time of 3 hours between connecting flights.

## TRANSIT IN NEW DELHI

All foreign nationals traveling to the Kingdom of Bhutan via India must possess a valid travel document and a valid Indian visa. Additionally, travelers must ensure that their Indian visa remains valid at the time of departure from India. Please note that transit through India is not permitted for passengers carrying check-in baggage, as Drukair does not offer luggage interline facilities at Delhi Airport. However, transit may be possible for passengers traveling with hand baggage only. In accordance with security regulations, each passenger is permitted to carry only one piece of hand baggage. The combined dimensions (length + breadth + height) must not exceed 100 cm, and the weight must not exceed 5 kg for Economy Class and 7 kg for Business Class.

Therefore, we highly recommend that all travelers transiting through India (Delhi) process their Indian visa prior to their arrival in the country. It takes about 3-4 working days for an Indian e-Tourist visa to get approved from the date of application. For applications, you may visit: [www.indianvisaonline.gov.in](http://www.indianvisaonline.gov.in), or you may apply through their nearest Indian embassy.

## TRANSPORTATION & GETTING AROUND

While all visitors coming to Bhutan are required to have all their transportation pre-arranged in advance, for those who would like to venture out to urban areas like Paro and Thimphu on their own for a short amount of time, local non-metered taxis abound. Most taxi drivers can communicate in English, but we highly suggest agreeing on the fare first before getting into the cab. Local city bus routes are also available around the main enclaves of Thimphu, but timings can be inconsistent, and delays are common.

**Travel by helicopter** is an easy and spectacular way to get around Bhutan, especially on remote corners and national parks, including scenic flights to the higher Himalayan ranges. All flights are operated by the Royal Bhutan Helicopter and can be arranged for you by Amankora. Visit their official website [HERE](#) for more information on flights, destinations, prices, and packages.

## TREKKING / CAMPING

For those wanting to explore more of Bhutan's natural environment, overnight treks and camping adventures can be arranged for you by Amankora through a third-party company.

Adventures vary from easy 1-2-night camps (Bumdra Trek & Druk Path Trek, etc) to advanced treks covering further areas (Dagala Trek, Jomolhari Trek, Poppy Trek, among others) from hermit monasteries, crystal lakes, to yak herder camps and bloom-filled poppy fields for the more intrepid travelers.





## VACCINATIONS

It is always good to have tetanus, typhoid, and hepatitis boosters before traveling to Asia. No other shots or pills are required. For immunisations and vaccines, we recommend you seek the advice of your physician. For additional information, please visit [CDC](#) or [World Health Organization](#).

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

We strongly recommend purchasing travel insurance from a recognized provider. This will help cover unforeseen circumstances such as cancellations due to medical reasons, professional commitments, or travel interruptions

## VISA AND IMMIGRATION

All visitors to Bhutan, except Indian nationals, require a visa. For most countries, the visa must be obtained in advance, while visitors from Bangladesh and the Maldives can obtain a visa either in advance or on arrival. Indian citizens can apply for a permit, which may also be obtained in advance or on arrival. They must enter with an Indian passport or voter ID, and those under 18 may use a passport or birth certificate, accompanied by a legal guardian.

The approved visa letter, in essence, stands as a visa that must be shown to the immigration authorities upon arrival at the Paro International Airport and only then will a stamp be placed in the passport. Please note that each passport should have a validity of at least 6 months from the intended date of departure from the Kingdom.

## WATER

Travelers are advised to avoid untreated or unboiled water. Water at Amankora is fully treated, and bottled water is also available.

## WEATHER

Due to its variety of elevations and wide range of geographic features, mobile weather apps and online forecasts do not provide an accurate representation of the actual weather in different parts of Bhutan. We suggest checking the Bhutan Broadcasting Service site [here](#) for a daily update of local weather in Bhutan.

## WHAT TO BRING

Druk Air and Bhutan Airlines limit you to a maximum free baggage allowance of **30kg** for economy class and **40kg** for business class. To comply with the security regulations, passengers may carry only one hand baggage. The sum of three dimensions (length, breadth, and height) should not exceed **100cm**, and the weight must not exceed **5kg**. An infant under 2 years of age and not occupying a seat is not entitled to baggage allowance. For this reason, laundry services at Amankora are complimentary.

- Year-round, we recommend sunscreen, sunglasses, and lip balm
- Electronic chargers for your camera, phone, iPad, etc., and extra camera memory card(s)
- Electrical converter and outlet adapters are available in all our lodges. Bhutan's electrical voltage is 230 volts.

## GENERAL AMANKORA PACKING LIST

- Hiking boots
- Sneakers/sport shoes
- Waterproof jacket
- Hiking / outdoor wear for daytime
- Casual leisure wear for evenings
- Swimsuit
- Sunglasses
- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Charger banks for car journeys (wifi boxes are provided in all Amankora Journey vehicles)

We recommend packing multiple layers, such as tops, fleeces, and light jackets, as the weather in Bhutan changes frequently.

## SEASONAL PACKING LIST

### Spring & Autumn

- Medium-weight waterproof jacket

### Summer

- Waterproof shoes
- T-shirts
- Shorts/skirts
- Sunhat
- Light waterproof jacket
- Mosquito spray

### Winter

- Warm waterproof coat
- Hat
- Gloves
- Scarf
- Leggings and/or thermals

### Seasons in Bhutan

Spring: March to May / Summer: June to August / Autumn: September to November / Winter: December to February

### Amankora provides the following:

- Wooden walking sticks
- Umbrellas
- Bathrobes & slippers
- Hairdryers
- Shampoo, conditioner, body lotion and bath salts



## WILDLIFE & NATURE SAFARIS

With almost 70% of its natural forest cover left intact, wildlife thrives in Bhutan's national parks, nature reserves and Himalayan frontiers. For those eager to explore the Land of the Thunder Dragon's wild and untouched corners, below are parks not to be missed:

### ROYAL MANAS NATIONAL PARK

Known as the 'Crown Jewel of Bhutan' and the oldest protected area in the kingdom, this park spreads over a large area that overlaps with India's Manas Tiger Reserve. Here, the legendary Bengal Tigers co-exist with Asian elephants, one-horned rhinoceros, clouded leopards, Himalayan black bears, Ganges dolphins, and pangolins. Because of its remoteness, the best way to reach and explore the park is by private helicopter, which Amankora can arrange for guests.

### JIGME DORJI NATIONAL PARK

The largest national park in the country straddling the northern corridors of the districts of Paro, Thimphu, Wangduephodrang, Punakha, and Gasa, the park is named after the late 3<sup>rd</sup> Dragon King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Covering a wide range of elevations up to more than 5000 meters, the park hosts an incredible diversity of wildlife, from Bengal tigers to red pandas, Himalayan blue sheep and the famed snow leopard thriving in the world's tallest unclimbed peaks.

### ROYAL TAKIN PRESERVE

A short hike away from Amankora Thimphu, the area is an enclosed forest housing the kingdom's national animal, the takin – a unique mammal resembling a cross between a goat, a buffalo, and a sheep featured in local legends. The reserve is also home to sambar deer.

## WHEELCHAIR / HANDICAP ACCESS

Wheelchairs are available upon request and can be arranged for guests to use in any of the five Amankora Lodges, subject to availability.

Due to the terrain and the mountainous landscape of Bhutan, some activities and sites might be tricky or difficult to access for some guests with disability or mobility issues. Our team at Amankora can design your adventures with consideration of these circumstances and offer alternatives.

## WEDDINGS

Amankora's spectacular natural surroundings, distinct Himalayan culture deeply entrenched in its Vajrayana Buddhist faith, and unique architecture mean that almost every turn reveals yet another setting suitable for exchanging or renewing your vows. Ceremonies can be held on the lodge grounds or inside any of the five lodges, in some select temples, or in private sites outside the lodges, to name just a few of the possibilities.

Official marriage licenses are not issued in the Kingdom of Bhutan if neither of the parties being married is of Bhutanese origin. Ceremonies, vows and Buddhist blessings arranged by Amankora are non-legally binding. The Buddhist faith in Bhutan welcomes anyone, regardless of beliefs, religion, and affiliations, to take part in the blessings.



## YOUNG TRAVELERS, CHILDREN AND BABIES

With many cultural, natural, and adventure-oriented activities to experience, Bhutan has become an increasingly popular destination for families and multi-generation travel. If you are planning to bring your infant, we recommend bringing baby sling carriers instead of strollers for better mobility. A travel cot for the long car rides is also advised. Changes in altitude often create ear discomfort for babies, so make sure to bring pacifiers and soothers.

Amankora can create bespoke itineraries and adventures for children of all ages. Thimphu, Paro and Punakha are teeming with activities, from visits to the Takin Reserve, animal shelters, making your own stamps in the post office, to light adventures and art & crafting activities.

## ZIP CODES, POST AND PARCEL

Mail service within the country and airmail abroad is available, but can be slow at times, unless it is registered or express mail. International parcel post is available (DHL and FedEx). Bhutanese stamps are particularly beautiful; do not miss the Philatelic Bureau in Thimphu, or make your own stamps with your photography at the Thimphu Post Office.

District	Zip Code
Thimphu	11001
Paro	12001
Punakha	13001
Wangdue Phodrang (Gangtey)	14001
Bumthang	32001

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[aman.com](http://aman.com)