

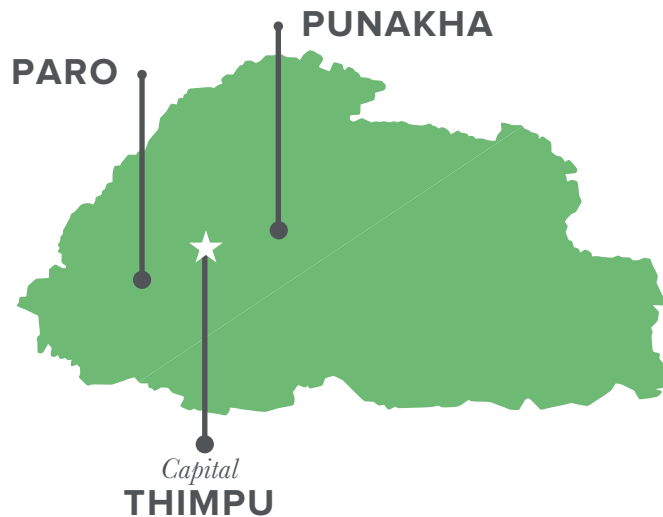
# WILD GUANABANA WELCOMES YOU TO BHUTAN!



## ENTERING BHUTAN

### VISA

We will do the visa process and get it issued for you :)  
Visa fees are included in the trip price too. We just need your scanned passport copies to be able to submit all documents to the Bhutanese immigration dept.



### WEATHER

*December - January*

min. -15c

max. 28c

*April - May*

min. 15c

max. 25c

### CURRENCY



**BHUTANESE NGULTRUM**

*Exchange Rate*

**USD 1 = 72.32 BTN**

### LANGUAGE



**DZONGKHA**

### RELIGION



**HINDUISM & BUDDHISM**

### PLUGS & VOLTAGE



*Plug*  
**TYPE D & E**

*Voltage*  
**230 V**

### DIALLING CODE



**+975**

## STAYING SAFE!

*Bhutanis considered a safe country but normal cautious procedures should be taken into consideration.*

**CHECK THE [SAFETY LINK](#) FOR MORE DETAILS**

## EMERGENCY CONTACTS:

*Ninda | WG's Local Partner*

**+975 1711 3748**

**+975 774444 67**

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# A GUIDE TO TRAINING FOR BHUTAN

## WHO IS THIS FOR? GETTING YOUR BODY PREPARED

Trekking in Bhutan is a multiple-day hiking and camping in very cold weather. In light of this hiking and walking are ideal forms of preparation for your body. Hiking at altitude is hard work and so the more preparation you do the better – but not to the point of over exerting yourself or stressing your body especially a few days before the hike. Therefore, the best bet is to work exercise into your daily routine and where possible try to have extended walks where you can wear in your boots, carry your heavy rucksack and get used to some weight on your shoulders and increase your aerobic ability. If you can combine more exertive exercise, such as swimming and even other forms of aerobic exercise then great – remember that you will be walking for a number of days and so the fitter you are the more adapt your body is to this level of exercise. Also if you've camped before in the outdoors and are used to low temperatures that would help you a lot prepare physically and mentally for this hike in Bhutan.

## A POTENTIAL 3-MONTH TRAINING PROGRAM IS AS FOLLOWS:

### Journey Date Minus 3 Months

- Gym / fitness class / any selection of fitness session x 2 times a week: choose workouts that make you work hard and increase fitness rather than build muscle.
- Walking: walk whenever possible – short 10 minute walks are fine, go to the shops, see friends, short trips you might normally take a bus or taxi for.
- Diet: cut out soft drinks with sugar or sweeteners and junk food. Remember this is a once in a lifetime event – use it as a great excuse to get healthy!

### Journey Date Minus 2 Months

- Gym session x 3 times a week: again choose workouts that make you work hard and increase fitness rather than build muscle. No need to go crazy, but doing 3 workouts a week breeds discipline and mental stamina as well as improving physical conditioning. You can even substitute 1 gym session for an alternative activity such as Yoga (even better yoga session every morning!) or swimming .
- Walking: keep walking! – short 10 minute walks are good, but increase your distance to at least 1 hour once a week. That's only 4 x 1 hour walks for the whole month!
- Diet: keep healthy but remember to feed the fire! When you exercise you will burn lots of calories and so replace lost fuel and keep very well hydrated – water is life, drink, drink. Lots of water helps flush out toxins and maintains a healthy perfusion of the bodies cells.

### **Journey Date Minus 1 Month**

- Gym session x 3 times a week: no need to go crazy on the gym sessions, simply keep up a good routine. Do not over exercise! Going over 3 times a week increases the risk of injury and muscle damage which will prevent you from even starting, which is not what we want.
- Walking: be realistic and set 4 hikes for this month of around 3 – 2 hours each. Keep walking when ever possible. Again, overexertion and strains should be avoided at all costs, but some hill work and distance will definitely help wear in those boots and prepare you mentally.
- Diet: a good well balanced diet is the way to be. Any loss of body weight or toning should really have been done in the last couple of months and now keeping healthy and maintaining the status quo is our goal. Lots of water and enough calorie intake to complement your exercise routine.

### **Journey Date Minus 1 Week**

- RELAX. No need for last minute blasts or burnouts. Take a good walk at the beginning of the week and then simply relax. If you haven't prepared up to this point then training one week from your arrival is not going to help (people that take that approach should expect to find the hike hard work and possibly be ready to fail). Being MENTALLY RELAXED is as important as physical conditioning. Even if you haven't managed to put in lots of training time the same applies.







*Note: wearing in your boots will avoid discomfort on the journey– serious blisters can seriously affect your ability to walk and for this reason we also recommend carrying / wearing them on the plane.*










Getting your body prepared tends to go further than this. Many people work really hard right up to the night before they leave, and then arrive tired and start trekkingtired. A stressed body will not performas well as a relaxed body and so give your body a chance and try to prepare early. You can also spend extra days in Bhutan relaxing before the journey if you have ample time.



















# BHUTAN EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

*This list is only a guide. While you are required to bring everything on this list (unless otherwise stated), there are numerous options, brands, and versions of each piece of equipment. Please let us know if you need advice on what product to go with.*

CLIMBING EQUIPMENT		
<b>Adjustable Ski/Trekking poles.</b> 1 pair.		
<b>Head torch.</b> Bring extra batteries (preferably Lithium).		
FOOTWEAR		
<b>Running shoes or sandals.</b> 1 pair to wear at the end of every day for comfort.		
<b>Light Hiking Boots or trekking shoes.</b> 1 pair of sturdy boots in which you can wear a light synthetic sock under a heavy sock comfortably, either wool or synthetic. Shoes should be very <u>Water Proof</u> and <u>Warm</u> . Example: X ULTRA 3 MID GTX Salomon		
<b>Wool or Synthetic Socks.</b> 3 pair heavyweight socks (wool is warmer). If you're going to be layering socks, check fit over feet and inside boots. Remember to keep one fresh, dry pair of socks available.		
<b>Liner Socks.</b> 3 pair of smooth thin wool, nylon or Capilene to be worn next to the skin. This reduces the incidence of blisters and hot-spots and makes the outer sock last longer before needing to be changed. They should fit well with your heavyweight socks.		

<b>TECHNICAL CLOTHING</b>		
<p><b>Thermal Underwear.</b> 2 pairs of Tops &amp; 1 pair of bottoms, Capilene, other synthetic or wool. <b><u>No Cotton.</u></b> Lightweight is preferable as it is more versatile. Zip-T-neck tops allow more ventilation options. If available, bring 1 set of white or light colored for intense sunny days and 1 pair of dark for other days. Example: Ice Breathe Merino Baselayer</p>		
<p><b>Synthetic Shirts.</b> Sweat wicker material. <b><u>No Cotton</u></b> Preferably 1 short sleeved and 2 long sleeved. Light colors preferred.</p>		
<p><b>Fleece/Soft Shell jacket.</b> 1 Mid and 1 Heavyweight fleece. A full-zip version is easier to put on and has better ventilation than a pullover. Zip-T's are also good. Example: Mountain Hardwear Fairing Soft Jacket</p>		
<p><b>Down or Synthetic jacket.</b> Heavy weight for cold days and evenings. 600 - 800 fill down. Example: North Face Immaculator Parka.</p>		
<p><b>Hard Shell jacket w/ hood.</b> We recommend a waterproof breathable shell material with full front zipper, underarm zips, and no insulation. This outer layer protects against wind and rain. Example: Mountain Hardwear Quasar Lite II</p>		
<p><b>Trekking Pants.</b> 3x pairs of synthetic pants to be worn every day. <b>Insulated Trousers.</b> 1x pair for high-altitude trekking (above 4000m)</p>		
<p><b>Underwear.</b> Synthetic.</p>		
<b>HANDWEAR</b>		
<p><b>Lightweight synthetic gloves.</b> Quick drying material. Should fit comfortably inside heavy gloves. Example: North Face Flashdry Gloves</p>		
<p><b>Heavy Gloves.</b> A good pair of heavy gloves works well. Should not be too tight or too loose so that it's warm enough. Example: North Face G3 Insulated Gloves</p>		

HEADWEAR		
<b>Warm Lightweight synthetic/wool hat.</b> Preferably hat should cover ears.		
<b>Baseball cap/sun hat.</b> One with a good visor to shade the nose and eyes. Synthetic is nice as it dries quickly but not necessary.		
<b>Bandana/Buff.</b> Used to shade your neck from continuous sun exposure.		
<b>Glacier Glasses.</b> Should have category 3 or 4 lenses to protect against extreme UV conditions in snow / ice. Example: Julbo Sherpa		
PERSONAL EQUIPMENT		
<b>Trekking Backpack.</b> A daypack big enough to carry water bottles, camera, lunch and extra clothing. Horses carry the rest. 30-40L is a good capacity.		
<b>Water Bottles:</b> 2 Wide mouth bottles with minimum 1 Litre capacity per bottle. 1 or 2L water bag or bladder systems is also good in the lower regions but tend to freeze higher up, so bring one insulated water bottle. Total carrying capacity should be 2L.		
<b>Sunscreen.</b> SPF 30 or higher, Make sure that the sunscreen is not older than 6 months as it would lose half of its SPF rating.		
<b>Lipscreen.</b> SPF 40 or higher, again not older than 6 months.		
<b>Sports Drink Mix (optional).</b> Powdered electrolyte drink mix can help you rehydrate. Bring 1-2 Servings per day for 7 days.		
<b>Sleeping bag.</b> Expedition quality to at least -15 <sup>0</sup> comfort rating. Down is warmer but more expensive than synthetics, Synthetic is lighter and less bulky. Choose wisely!		

<b>TRAVELING</b>		
<b>Dry Sacks.</b> Keeps clothing and other items dry and organized.		
<b>Duffle Bag.</b> A small duffle can be nice for storing things at the hotel during the expedition and extra clothing while traveling. The duffle bag is to be carried by the horsemen, so maximum weight is 15 KGs.		
<b>Zip lock bags.</b> To store food, tablets, documents, camera etc.		
<b>Trail snack food items (optional).</b> Bring your favorite energy bars, GU packets etc for the long days . Don't over pack snacks though because it adds a lot to the weight.		
<b>Travel clothes.</b> Don't forget to bring clothing to wear after the hike on your return home and for days in Paro and Thimpu. Otherwise, no one will want to sit next to you on the plane!		
<b>Toiletries.</b> Soap, wet wipes, toothbrush, towel, hand sanitizer, foot powder, dust mask, ear plugs, insect repellent etc.		



## MEDICAL & SAFETY

**Small personal first-aid kit.** The guides will have a first-aid kit. Please let us know about any medical issues before the trek.



**Drugs/Medications/Prescriptions.** Hikers should bring Pepto Bismol, Ciprofloxin (Cipro) 500mg tablets for traveler's diarrhea and for urinary tract infections, Azithromycin (Z-pak) 250mg tablets for non-gastrointestinal infections, Acetazolamide (Diamox) 125 or 250 mg tablets for altitude sickness, Ibuprofen 200mg or Acetaminophen (Tylenol) tablets for altitude headaches, sprains, aches, etc.



*In regards to renting, we do gear rental from our Egypt office, below is a list with all the equipment and prices.*

*Please note that the items below are the property of Wild Guanabana and are on loan to you for the purpose of the trip. Should any of the items be damaged/go lost you will be charged the full cost of replacing them. If the item(s) is not available then a similar one will be chosen in its place. A 50\$ deposit will be returned to you once all items have been inspected.*

ITEM	PRICE IN USD
Balaclava	10
Sleeping Bag (-29C)	50
Sleeping Mat	10
Therm-A-Rest	25
Hiking Pole (single)	15
Gaiters	20
Head-Torch	15
Thin Gloves/Liner Gloves	10
Thick Gloves	20
Thick Gloves with Inners	30
Rain Jacket	30
Rain Pants	25
Mid-Layer/Convertible Pants	20
Water Platypus/Bottle	10
Mid-Weight Fleece	15
Heavy Fleece	20
Warm Hat	10
Sun Hat	10
Dry Sack	10
Synthetic/Down Jacket	40
Pair of Socks (4 season)	10
Pair of Socks (3 season)	10
Duffel Bag	30
Backpack	30

***Take nothing but memories and leave nothing but your footprint.***

There are no gear shops in Bhutan, so make sure you get all your gear before arrival.



# TIPS & TRICKS

## HIKING PACK

Your hiking pack should only contain in it your water, your extra sweater/gloves/sunglasses/etc., waterproofs, and camera, snacks. Everything else will be in your main duffel bag, which will be carried by the horsemen. You wont even see your duffel bag as the horsemen are much faster and they will get to the campsite probably before you.

## DUFFEL BAG

While packing your stuff in the duffel bag, **please note that all of your items in the duffel bag cannot exceed 20kg as per regulations or else the horsemen will not carry them.** Everything needs to fit in your duffel bag - the only items that should be in your hiking day pack are extra layers of clothing for the day hike in case you get cold or feel hot, camera, snacks, medication, etc. - and that's all!

You don't want it to be any more than that or else it will be too heavy for you since you will be walking for long hours. Don't over pack! You will not be changing your clothes as often as you think! Especially the last few days you will be cold and tired so some have slept and woken up and hiked in the same clothes for 2 days straight and it was all good! Just bring what is necessary and if you follow the checklist you should be okay.

## PACKING TIPS

The trick here is to minimize the amount of time you need in the morning and before you sleep. So you want to make sure you pack in a way that helps you find what you are looking for as fast as possible without having to dig too hard into your bag. The best way in our experience is to place everything in Zip Lock Bags according to their category. The good thing about zip lock bags is that they are see-through so you can see what's in them right away. Another good thing is that they are waterproof so in case it rains it will keep your items dry. For example, you can place all of your toiletries in one zip lock such as: soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, facewash, toner, cotton pads, etc. Then you can place all of your underwear in another zip lock, your passport and any important documents in another, your medicine and any medical supplies in another, your socks together, etc. That way you can always find your items quickly and it will also keep them dry.

## SLEEPING BAG

This is important because even though you will be sleeping in expedition quality tents, the weather can get very cold at night. So, you will feel the cold especially as we go higher up. If you are the type that likes a pillow – there are a few tricks for that. You can either bring an empty pillowcase and stuff it with clothes to sleep on, or you can bring the inflatable airplane pillows. We provide a sleeping mat or a foam mat.

## HIKING SHOES

We hope you are wearing them daily! Make sure they are high enough to support your ankles and made out of an insulated material so that they can keep you warm and they also need to be waterproof. They also need to be a half size bigger as sometimes you may feel the need to wear at least 2 socks to stay warm -so its important that your hiking boots have room for that. It's important to wear them early on so you can loosen them up before the hike, especially if they are brand new.

## GLOVES

This is a tip for gloves: What keeps your fingers warm is actually the air pockets between the gloves so make sure that you buy your gloves a bit bigger than normal so that when you wear them on top of each other there is still room in between them. If they are all too tight you wont feel warm - so you need to make sure the air pockets are there.

## SOCKS

Your socks need to be made out of wool'ish material absolutely no cotton! -- They call them 3 season or 4 season socks, kind of like the ones you would wear for skiing.

## CAMERA

Since this is a super awesome trip, you definitely want to bring a camera with you. Some of you if you are photo enthusiasts will want to bring your SLR. You can but we don't recommend it, as they are heavy and bulky. A normal digital camera will do. In the case of batteries, make sure you bring extras! The trick with camera batteries is to bring extras and always keep them in a warm place, like inside your socks in your duffel bag - as the cold makes the battery life deplete a lot faster. Also, interchanging the battery is believed to be better and also makes it last longer than using one full battery till it runs out and then switching to another one.

## CAMP SHOES/CLOTHES

Once you get to the campsite you're going to want to take off your hiking boots and get into something comfortable. We suggest bringing something that's easy to slip on and off - versus something with laces. Since if you have to go to the bathroom at night the last thing you want to be doing is fumbling in pitch-black darkness with laces and the likes of. You may also want to bring comfortable lounge pants like sweat pants or something to keep you warm.

## GEAR LIST

Everything on our gear list is mandatory so we can't stress enough that you should go over it again and again and make sure you have everything, every little thing counts! Please contact us if you need gear advice or have any questions.

## HYGIENE

The best thing to bring with you is Dettol wipes or baby wipes. These will be your new best friends on the mountain! So you can use them for obvious reasons and you can also use them in what we like to call «Dettol Showers» and just wipe yourself down in your tent to freshen up. Some people have also taken with them Dry Shampoo, so you can do that as well. Or you can just hide your hair under a hat that works as well! Please also make sure you bring your own toilet paper. You can also bring with you a body spray to feel fresh and nice smelling. Warm water will be provided every morning to wash your face.

## NAILS

Make sure you cut your toe nails really short. This is important especially when hiking down, as the pressure on your toes from the boots have caused some people to lose their nails when they get home. It's not fun so if you keep them short you should be okay.

## BLISTERS

Some people get them from the long hours of walking. The last thing you want on a trek is a blister as that can seriously make your life miserable when you are there. The trick we find best for this is «Pre-Emptive Behavior». That means you wrap your sensitive spots, like your heels, certain toes, etc. with gauze and medical white tape as soon as you start the trek. This will protect those areas from extra friction and save you from blisters. So you wrap them up like you already have a blister - before you get the blister. It works for us!

## PHONES

There is reception in almost every part of Bhutan with minimal exception on the trail. If you want to be absolutely connected, then please feel free to purchase a local sim card in Bhutan. The battery trick here is the same as the camera one so keep your phone in a dry and warm place so it lasts longer and keep it turned off when you are not using it.

## TREKKING IN BHUTAN

Trekking in Bhutan is different from other regions in Himalaya or Asia. Trekking offers the opportunity to see a Bhutan that is scarcely touched by modern times. 80% of Bhutan's landscape is covered with forests, and nowhere is this more evident than on a trek where you will often be trekking through protected areas and may have a chance to see wildlife in its native habitat. There are no lodges or hotels in the mountains and so you camp in tents.

## TREKKING IN BHUTAN (continued)

On most treks the daily gain of elevation is approximately 500m. However, it can be more than this on some days, even 1500m, depending on the trek. The distance for each days trekking is normally between 14 and 16km. You can always take plenty of time during the day to cover this distance, take time for rest. Most trek days require six to eight hours of walking and you do have to keep moving to get to camp before dark. Many of the treks are along ancient trade routes, on which the trails may be rocky, sometimes muddy.

It is possible to encounter snow, especially on high passes or rain in the valleys. Like any the other parts of Himalayas, the descents can be long and steep and unrelenting. If you are an experienced walker and often hike 12 to 16km a day with a backpack, a trek in Bhutan should prove no difficulty. Trekking in the Himalayas is often thought to be only for the super fit, but there are treks suited to all levels. Many first time trekkers are pleasantly surprised at how easy the hiking can be if you carry only a light backpack and do not have to worry about setting up a camp, finding water and preparing meals. The most important thing is that you are happy to walk for several days and you enjoy camping.

Bhutanese guides are expert walkers who have been trained as trekking guides and follow routes that have been walked for centuries. They are trained to look out for altitude sickness and other ailments that can affect trekkers. All trekkers are required to strictly follow trekking rules to protect the fragile environment at high altitudes.

## PACK PONIES AND PORTERS

Unless specially arranged, treks in Bhutan do not use porters. All your personal gear, plus the tents, kitchen equipment and food, is carried by pack horses and at higher elevations by yaks. We arrange horses through local horse contractors at the starting point of each trek. Horse owners' accompany the trek to arrange the loads and also to make sure of his animals' well being. Pack animals may have to be switched along the way because some of the longer trek crosses into different region, which requires the use of local contractor. At higher elevations, horses are replaced by yaks. We send messages ahead so that replacement animals are waiting at the boundary. Food, tents and camp gear are packed in rectangular, covered baskets called Zhem, which are then lashed to a wooden packsaddle. Trekkers' duffel bags are placed inside locally provided duffel/sack for extra protection and then tied onto the animals, while you set off on the trek.

## FOOD ON A TREK

You can rely entirely on our camp meals and not carry any food with you to Bhutan. If you wish, you may bring a small supply of dates or trail mix for snacks – some people like to carry these. Our cook can look after any special dietary requirements with advance notice. There is almost no fresh food available on trek routes and so the entire supplies must be carried from the start of the trek. Whenever the fresh supplies are available locally, our crew will purchase it to also help local farmers. Fresh vegetables and meats brought from the start of the trek usually last for a week or so. Our cooks have been trained to use dried vegetable, smoke meats and of course canned foods are also brought along. There are few opportunities to buy limited fresh vegetables, meat and we also hope for some trout filled lakes or streams along the way. We use stoves fueled by LPG gas, which makes cooking fast and clean. Our cooks are adept at producing a reasonable variety of Western and Asian dishes.

## A TYPICAL DAY ON A TREK

On a typical trek in Bhutan, you are woken up with tea around dawn (around 7-7:30am). Then you are provided with a bowl of warm water to wash and brush. Breakfast is served in the dining tent or you can enjoy the sunshine with breakfast outside. After breakfast, our crew take down the tents, clean the campsite, pack the bags/boxes and begin loading the animals, at which time you and your guide set-off on the trail. This process of taking down and loading the animals in the morning may seem tedious chore but is done amazingly fast while you are getting ready yourself. During the day, for most part of the time, you walk at your own pace and stop to take pictures or admire landscapes. All you carry is a personal backpack containing your water bottle, camera and jacket and accessories that you need during the day. Around noon a hot lunch or packed picnic lunch with tea, coffee and juice is served. In the evening, when you reach the campsite, our staff prepare and serve tea/coffee and snacks. The sleeping tents, kitchen tents, toilet tents and dining tents are pitched. The dining-cum-social tent is well lit by camp gas-lanterns, which also provide warmth and there is an endless supply of hot water for tea/coffee and some alcoholic beverages. Around 6-7pm, full dinner is served. When you are ready to sleep, you are provided with hot water bottles to warm your sleeping bags. You will sleep in a tent with foam pads placed on the floor as a mattress. All your gear goes into the tent with you at night. The Bhutanese crew will sleep in nearby tents.

## CLIMATE / WEATHER

The climate in Bhutan is extremely varied, which can be attributed to two main factors-the vast differences in altitude present in the country and the influence of North Indian monsoons. Southern Bhutan has a hot and humid subtropical climate that is fairly unchanging throughout the year. Temperatures can vary between 15-30 degrees Celsius. In the Central parts of the country which consists of temperate and deciduous forests, the climate is more seasonal with warm summers and cool and dry winters. In the far Northern reaches of the kingdom, the weather is much colder during winter. Mountain peaks are perpetually covered in snow and lower parts are still cool in summer owing to the high altitude terrain.

Bhutan has four distinct seasons in a year. The Indian summer monsoon begins from late-June through July to late-September and is mostly confined to the southern border region of Bhutan. Bhutan's generally dry spring starts in early March and lasts until mid-April. Summer weather commences in mid-April with occasional showers and continues to late June. The heavier summer rains last from late June through late September which are more monsoonal along the southwest border. Autumn, from late September or early October to late November, follows the rainy season. It is characterized by bright, sunny days and some early snowfalls at higher elevations. From late November until March, winter sets in, with frost throughout much of the country and snowfall common above elevations of 3,000 meters. The winter northeast monsoon brings gale-force winds at the highest altitudes through high mountain passes, giving Bhutan its name - Druk-yul, which means Land of the Thunder Dragon in Dzongkha (the native language). After sunset weather changes drastically and can reach -15 degree Celsius, so make sure you have warm comfortable clothes



# EXTRAS

## STAYING HEALTHY

Bhutan does NOT require any immunizations for entry, although it is recommended to be vaccinated against Polio & Tetanus (if nil in last 10 years), Typhoid (if nil in last 3 days) and Hepatitis A. Since most vaccines don't provide immunity until two weeks after they're given, we recommend a visit to the doctor three to eight weeks before departure.

Traveler's diarrhea is the most common illness affecting travelers, involving a substantial number of international travelers each year. You can minimize the risk for Traveler's Diarrhea by avoiding to eat foods and drink beverages in places with poor hygienic conditions, abstaining from consuming raw or undercooked meat and seafood, and avoiding raw fruits and veggies unless they can be peeled. Needless to say that frequently washing your hands is the prudent thing to do, whether at home or abroad.

While on the trip, you will have access to an extensive first-aid kit, but it's always a good idea to bring a small med kit of your own, feel free to do but keep it simple.

## SAFETY

Bhutan is not a dangerous country to travel in, but it is not crime-free either. Petty crime does exist, particularly in tourist areas. Be careful when using ATM machines and try not to walk alone at night. Do not exhibit valuable personal belongings (camera, iPod, passport, credit cards, watch, jewelry, etc) when you don't need to. Never leave your bag(s) out of your sight or unattended. Keep your important documents and money safely hidden under your clothes (not in your backpack or day pack) or locked in a secure place. Care should be taken throughout your stay in Bhutan. Use your common sense and vigilance to minimize the risk of becoming a victim to crime.

## MONEY

Traveling with large amounts of cash is NOT recommended. There are several ATM machines that accept debit cards, VISA, and MasterCard in Thimphu. If you choose to bring an ATM card, alert your bank before leaving the country that you will be traveling in Bhutan to avoid any problems with access to your account. Travelers Checks are an alternative, although you are limited in where and when you may cash them.

## PEOPLE OF BHUTAN

There are numerous ethnic groups in Bhutan, and no one group constitutes a majority of the Bhutanese. The Bhutanese are of four main ethnic groups, which themselves are not necessarily exclusive: the politically and culturally dominant Ngalop of western and northern Bhutan; the Sharchop of eastern Bhutan; the Lhotshampa concentrated in southern Bhutan; and Bhutanese tribal and aboriginal peoples living in villages scattered throughout Bhutan.

**Ngalop** The Ngalop (meaning "earliest risen" or "first converted" according to folk etymology) are people of Tibetan origin who migrated to Bhutan as early as the ninth century. For this reason, they are often referred to in literature as "Bhote" (people of Bhutia/Bhotia or Tibet). The Ngalop introduced Tibetan culture and Buddhism to Bhutan and were the dominant political and cultural element in modern Bhutan. Their language, Dzongkha, is the national language and is descended from Old Tibetan. The Ngalop are dominant in western and northern Bhutan, including Thimphu and the Dzongkha-speaking region.

**Sharchop** The Sharchop (meaning "easterner"), are the populations of mixed Tibetan, South Asian and Southeast Asian descent that mostly live in the eastern districts of Bhutan. The Sharchop account for most of the population of eastern Bhutan. Although long the biggest single ethnic group in Bhutan, the Sharchop have been largely assimilated into the Tibetan-Ngalop culture. Most Sharchop speak Tshangla, a Tibeto-Burman language. Because of their proximity to India, some speak Assamese or Hindi.

**Indigenous and tribal groups** Small aboriginal or indigenous tribal peoples live in scattered villages throughout Bhutan. Culturally and linguistically part of the populations of West Bengal or Assam, they embrace the Hindu system of endogamous groups ranked by hierarchy and practice wet-rice and dry-rice agriculture. They include the Brokpa, Lepcha, and Doya tribes as well as the descendants of slaves who were brought to Bhutan from similar tribal areas in India. The ex-slave communities tended to be near traditional population centers because it was there that they had been pressed into service to the state.

**Lhotshampa** The remaining population are the Lhotshampa (meaning "southerners"), the culture has historical links to Nepal, and speaks the same language as the Gorkha people with few differences, but has become an individual ethnicity over time. They were often referred to as Nepalese by the government of Bhutan. Officially, the government stated that 28 percent of the national population was Nepalese in the late 1980s, however unofficial estimates ran as high as 30 to 40 percent, and Nepalese were estimated to constitute a majority in southern Bhutan. The number of legal permanent Nepalese residents in the late 1980s may have been as few as 15 percent of the total Lhotshampa population, however. The first small groups of Nepalese, the most recent major groups to arrive in Bhutan, emigrated primarily from eastern Nepal under Anglo-Indian auspices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mostly Hindus, the Nepalese settled in the southern foothills. The Lhotshampa are generally classified as Hindus. However, this is an oversimplification as many groups that include the Tamang and the Gurung are largely Buddhist; the Kiranti groups that include the Rai and Limbu are largely animist followers of Mundhum (these latter groups are mainly found in eastern Bhutan). Their main festivals include Dashain and Tihar.

## CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

While Bhutan is one of the smallest countries in the world, its cultural diversity and richness are profound. As such, strong emphasis is laid on the promotion and preservation of its unique culture. By protecting and nurturing Bhutan's living culture it is believed that it will help guard the sovereignty of the nation.



## CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

**Festivals** Bhutan is rich in cultural diversity and this richness is further enhanced by the wide variety of elaborate and colorful religious festivals that are celebrated throughout the country. Every village is known for their unique festival though the most widely known is the annual Tshechu, an annual religious festival. As the Tshechu begins, the villagers and the general populace dress in their finest clothes and congregate at their local temples and monasteries where these festivals take place. Tshechus are usually occasions to mark important events in the life of the second Buddha, the Indian/Pakistani Tantric master known as Guru Rinpoche or the Precious Master. Various mask dances are performed together with songs and dances for three days on average. These religious celebrations are lively, high-spirited affairs during which people share meals of red rice, spicy pork, Ema Datshi and Momos (pork/beef dumplings) whilst drinking the heady traditional rice wine known as Ara. These occasions provide the villagers with a respite from the hard labor of their day to day lives and gives the community an opportunity to catch up with family and friends.

**Arts & Crafts** An essential part of Bhutan's cultural heritage are the thirteen traditional arts and crafts that have been practiced from time immemorial. These arts were formally categorized during the reign of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgay, the fourth temporal ruler of Bhutan. The thirteen arts and crafts are categorized as follows: Textiles, Bamboos, Wood Turning, Painting, Carpentry, Masonry, Carving, Clay Work, Bronze Casting, Iron Working, Ornament Making, Paper Making, Embroidery.

**Cuisine** The most distinctive characteristic of Bhutanese cuisine is its spiciness. Chillis are an essential part of nearly every dish and are considered so important that most Bhutanese people would not enjoy a meal that was not spicy.

Rice forms the main body of most Bhutanese meals. It is accompanied by one or two side dishes consisting of meat or vegetables. Pork, beef and chicken are the meats that are eaten most often. Vegetables commonly eaten include Spinach, pumpkins, turnips, radishes, tomatoes, river weed, onions and green beans. Grains such as rice, buckwheat and barley are also cultivated in various regions of the country depending on the local climate.

Most popular Bhutanese dishes are: Ema Datshi, Momos, Phaksha Paa, Jasha Maru, Red Rice & Tripe.

## BRING A JOKE!

The trail is long so sometimes it's nice to share a joke or two :)

## BRING SOME ENTERTAINMENT

Some people bring with them books (kindle is best so you don't have to worry about weight) or a journal - you're going to want to document this for your memories. Sometimes it will be cold to write so perhaps bringing a voice recorder is best to record your thoughts and memorable moments. Avoid bringing heavy items such as laptops as you won't get as much use out of those as you would think.

## BRING AN AWESOME ATTITUDE

Multi-day trekking is 90% mental so make sure you start visualizing yourself there - and bring with you a flag or a picture or whatever you want to take your photo with when you reach famous landmarks!

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

You have made a significant investment in your travel plans and while in most cases everything will run smoothly, situations may arise on or before your trip that are outside of our control and for which we cannot be held responsible. Travel insurance may help to make your trip more worry-free by protecting your investment and yourself.

Travel insurances can cover expenses resulting from situations such as:

- Trip Cancellation and Interruption due to sickness
- Emergency Medical Transportation
- Trip and Baggage Delay
- Lost or Stolen Baggage
- Doctor and Hospital Payments
- Travel Accidents
- Weather delays

There are plenty of options when it comes to travel insurance providers. We highly recommend World Nomad's single trip travel insurance. You can buy it here: <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-insurance/> (make sure you go for the Explorer package as that covers a higher altitude)

## TRAVEL GREEN TIPS

- Unplug your home and office appliances before leaving for the trip
- When researching your destination, try to go paperless and avoid printing unnecessary materials
- Pack lightly and leave the extra shoes and clothes at home
- Bring your own water bottle for filtered water instead of purchasing endless plastic bottles
- Pack a re-usable food container for snacks and meals on the go
- Bring a re-usable shopping bag to carry purchases made on the trip
- Bring rechargeable batteries and a battery charger
- Minimize your waste by not buying disposable items for which there are reusable alternatives
- Avoid pre-heating or pre-cooling your hotel room when you are not around
- Turn off the lights and appliances when you leave your hotel room
- Try to wash your own clothes as laundry service can waste a lot of precious water
- Eat local foods and order only ocean-friendly seafood
- Stay at small, locally owned and operated hotels
- Support sustainable tourism practices by forgoing certain comforts while on the journey
- Buy from local artisans and co-ops not department stores
- Do not purchase items made from endangered species
- Lend a helping hand to the communities you visit whenever you can - volunteer
- Stay on the trail - take only memories leave only footprints
- Respect the local culture and be mindful of cross-cultural differences when interacting with locals
- Plan your trip in conjunction with a local festival/event to get an insight into local culture and customs
- Try to fly with on-time airlines that fly non-stop whenever possible
- Consider offsetting your travel through carbon offset schemes or otherwise
- Share your knowledge and experiences with others