



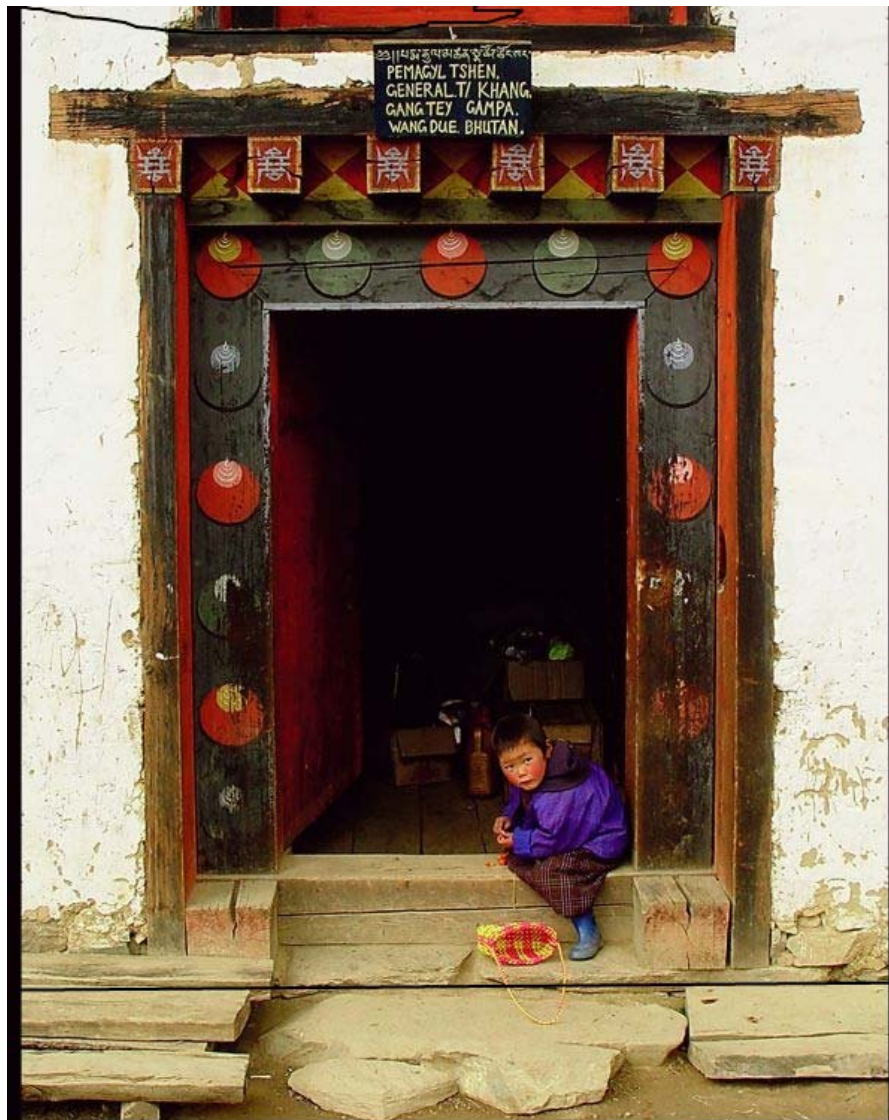
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Nine important attractions on Bhutan.

The surpassingly lovely, friendly, and tranquil kingdom of Bhutan is one of the world's most entrancing travel destinations. Getting to know it has been a balm and a revelation to our many travelers through the years. This is a country, exactly out of medieval European era.



(Girls playing on door way to shop)

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01. Bhutan and Buddhism



(Temples or Chorten are seen all through our the journey in Bhutan)

This peaceful and spiritual land is the only country that upholds teaching of Vajrayana school of Mahayana Buddhism. This Tantric Mahayana Buddhism is worshipped still in the form that was preached in Bhutan during 8th Century AD. The main practicing schools are the state sponsored Drukpa Kagyupa and the Nyingmapa.

Buddhism provides the essence of a unique identity for people of Bhutan. Indeed, Buddhism influences on the arts, festivals, in people's day to day life is immeasurable in Bhutan. It is not surprising that, even the landscape is made up of chortens, stonewalls, temples, monasteries, fortresses, associated with the concepts of peaceful Dharma. To this day, there is a strong association between state, religious and secular forms. Monks and Trulkus (reincarnations of high lamas) are highly regarded in society, and looked upon as guru, or spiritual teachers.

Bhutanese houses in common have a room on the upper floor where families maintain Buddhist Shrine to conduct daily day to day prayers, and rituals. Buddhism has for centuries brought eternal peace, harmony and happiness in People.

All these are indicative of vital role Buddhism plays throughout the nation history.

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02. Bhutanese Tsechu or Festivals



(Activity at Festivals)

Large proportion of visitor to Bhutan come to witness religious festivals held annually inside huge Dzong, resembling medieval period fortified in Europe.

The Buddhist festivals or Tsechus are one of the prime examples of the living culture of Bhutan that many have come to admire and to treasure. The Tsechu is in honour of Guru Rinpoche, the saint who brought Buddhism to Bhutan and the Himalayan world. These Tsechus are held in almost every 20 districts attracting hundreds of Bhutanese people in a spirit of festivity, celebration and deep faith for Buddhism.

The most crowded and popular festivals are ones, those held in Thimphu (Sept.-Oct), Chorten Kora (Feb-March), Paro (March-April), and Bumthang (Oct-Nov). They mark busiest period of the year for tourism. The smaller Tsechus are often more interesting as visitors get a close and better perspective of a local festival.

During festivals, this majestic Dzong come to life with colour, music and dancing. People from different walks of life, farmers, monks, govt. workers from throughout the districts valley flocks to festivals area in their best Bhutanese custom folk dresses and join together to exorcise evil spirits and rejoice new bounty harvest. Ancient and rare mask dances and other rituals are performed in the Dzong's courtyards and inside temples. Most festival dances date back to Middle Ages, and performed exclusively during festival, which comes once each year.

There are many types of dances, and each festival's dance has its own spiritual importance. It is performed by monks dressed in bright colourful costume.

Certain festivals end with the unveiling and worship of huge religious appliqués, Thangka or Thongdrels an embroidery of a Buddhist saint, some with height of 120 feet or more. The word Thongdrel means "liberation on sight" and people form long queues to receive blessings by touching their heads against the bottom of the Thongdrels. The thongdrel is usually unfurled during the last night of the festivals and taken away again before the first sunlight break in. Moment is considered very sacred and creates great excitement amongst all the visitors.



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Visitors to Bhutan can also witness other regional festivals spread through out the year, they are equally fascinating, and based on same theme, and principle.

One of the Tsechu in Bumthang take place at night unlike all others. It has exciting fire dances, naked public dances, which are intended to help the childless women at the festival to conceive. Photography opportunities at Tsechus are immense.

03. Dzong or Fortresses; Medieval times Guard.



Punakha Dzong (West Central Bhutan)

Dzong is a distinctive type of fortress found through out Bhutan. The architecture is massive in style with towering exterior walls surrounding a complex of courtyards, temples, administrative offices, and monk housing. Distinctive features include:

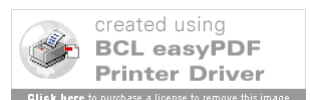
High inward sloping walls of brick and stone painted white with few or no windows in the lower sections of the wall. Chinese style flared roofs are used atop interior temples. Entry through massive entry doors made of wood and iron. Interior courtyards and temples brightly colored in Buddhist-themed arts and paintings.

In medieval period the dzongs were built using voluntary and obligatory labor which was applied as a tax against each household in the district. Under this obligation each family was to provision a decreed number of workers to work for several months at a time in the

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construction of the dzong.

Dzongs serve as the religious, administrative, and social centers for each district. They are often the site of an annual Tsechu or festivals or other religious festival. The rooms inside the Dzong are typically allocated half to administrative function (such as the office of the governor), and half to religious function headed by head abbot, and provides housing for monks. This division between administrative and religious functions reflects the idealized dual of power between the religious and administrative branches of government that steamed from 17th century.

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel was one of the important Architect, who have had initiated construction of Dzongs in Bhutan. He relied on visions and omens to site each of the dzongs. Modern military strategists would observe that the dzongs are well-sited with regard to their function as defensive fortresses. Wangdue Phodrang dzong, for instance, is set upon a spur overlooking the confluence of the Punacha River and Tsangchu River thus blocking any attacks by southern invaders who attempted to use a river route to bypass the trackless slopes of the middle Himalayas in attacking central Bhutan. Drukgyel dzong in west at the head of Paro valley guarded traditional Tobetan invasion path over the passes of the high Himalayas.



Inside Bjakar Dzong (Central Bhutan)
(Built in mid 1600s is the largest of all Dzongs in Bhutan).

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04. Bhutan Environmental Initiative and EcoTourism



(Jomolhari Trek Trail)

Conservation of natural resources remains a priority for the Bhutan. At present Bhutan has 72.5% of its land area under forest cover that includes 26.23% as protected areas. Bhutan has very high levels of biological diversity at the ecosystem, species and genetic levels. Bhutan ranks in the top ten countries on earth with the highest species density (species richness per unit area) in the world, and it has the highest fraction of land in protected areas and the highest proportion of forest cover of any Asian country. Bhutan “sustainable development” has come to mean “the capacity and political will to effectively address current development and environmental problems and tomorrow’s challenges without compromising our unique cultural integrity and heritage, or the quality of life of future generations of Bhutanese citizens.”

Bhutan’s Inventory of Greenhouse Gas under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change shows sequestered 3,321 kilotonnes of carbon. Therefore, at the global level, we remain a responsible environment friendly country.



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Ecotourism



Ecotourism is one of the most important components of Bhutan Tourism's strategy. All part of Bhutan offer visitors the opportunity for an exceptional natural and cultural experience set in a learning context.

Ecotourism caters to all most all types of visitors in Bhutan, including nature enthusiasts, bird watchers, adventure tourists, bikers, religious tours and education groups. Current popular ecotourism are visits to the Phobjikha valley to watch endangered black neck cranes, visit to Manas wildlife sanctuary which host one horned Rhino, Asian Elephants, and endangered Golden Langur, Cultural trek to Sakten, Nabji Korphu, and Kurtoe village in the far eastern Bhutan.



(Endangered Golden Langur)

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While in many other parts of the Himalayas the destruction of forests and loss of habitats have severely reduced wildlife population, Bhutan harbours many endangered species mainly due to the intact forests and the fact that this small country stretches from the subtropics in the south to the perennially frozen regions of the Himalayas in the north. Bhutan has 770 species of birds (15 globally threatened), 165 mammals (among them 24 internationally protected wild animal species) and 5500 species of vascular plants (among them 152 medical plants).

Bhutan's forests and pristine environment provides shelter to an astounding number of wildlife. There are nearly 200 mammals to be found in Bhutan including endangered species such as the tiger, snow leopard, clouded leopard, elephant, musk deer, Himalayan black bear, takin, red Panda, Asian elephant, pigmy hog, and the golden langur.

05. Village Textile Weaver, Bhutan's living Heritage.



(Hand woven silk table piece)

Weaving is an ancient art still practiced widely in Bhutan. Taking root in a rural Bhutan, a uniquely rich tradition of weaving has evolved over time with design and pattern unique to

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region. With skills handed down from generation to generation, mother to daughter, weaving in Bhutan is an art form that is representative of the very heart and souls of Bhutanese women. Fabrics fashioned in the looms, blends with magical colors and intricate designs patterns, are very eye catching product of Bhutanese living tradition.



(One of the hand crafted design)

The art of weaving although widespread is particularly impressive in Central and Eastern regions of Bhutan. In the villages of these regions, the “thump thump” of the handloom is a common sound and it will be an exceptional household where a woman does not weave clothes for the family and for earning extra income. In Kurtoe valley in far eastern Bhutan, it is not uncommon to come across teams of women seated on valley slopes with a heavy leather belt strapped fast to their waists. These women often during winter when field are empty, they spent long hours weaving Kushithara, unique to region, and best of best designs patterns, with matching colour, that have become synonymous with Bhutanese textile design.

Fabric are dyed with often vegetable dyes and dried for a week before being woven into khos for men and kiras for women. These are the garments which Bhutanese proudly wears as their national dresses.

Despite its isolation the cost of material and labour has translated into high price (in Western terms) for material. The weavers will bargain, a little, but do not be surprised if they do not budge from an average of US\$30 for a length. So unique are the Bhutanese weaving techniques that the United States’ Peabody Museum at Salem, Massachusetts, organized a world-wide exhibition solely on this subject.



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06. Unlimited Adventure Tourism and Unique Trekking destination.



(Scenery that you encounter during treks)

Adventure Sports and Trekking.

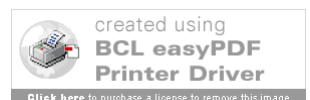
If you want that extra adrenaline rush as you go about exploring Bhutan, there is good news for you. Bhutan offers a number of exciting adventure sports like trekking, rafting, mountain biking and rock climbing. Besides, day hikes are gaining popularity amongst traveler to Bhutan. But for those who are still looking for sedate options, Bhutan also offers great opportunities for golfing, fishing kayaking or river rafting.

While on trek you will sight rare botanical plants, herbs, colourful birds and animals. It is common to see Takin, Blue Sheep, and Musk Deer and, in the lonely reaches of the high Himalaya, the elusive Snow Leopard. Perhaps, for all we know, even the mythical Yeti! Hike or Trekking in Bhutan is distinct and unlike anywhere else in Himalayas. Bhutan offer varied level of trekking opportunities. Some of the trek trials can be arduous but they are complemented by crystal clear air and scenic mountain views that defy poetic description. Only handful of tourist had trekked here each year and paths and communication may not be as developed as they are in other Himalayan destinations. However what Bhutan may lack

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in infrastructural development, it makes up for in superb support facilities provided for trekkers. All parties are accompanied by a trained and certified guide, cooks, assistants and at least one Yakman. All provision and most belongings are carried by horses and yaks; trekkers rarely have to carry more than a day pack with camera and extra film.

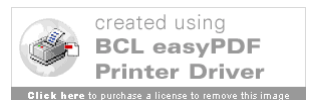


(Mule Crossing Stream on one of the Trek path)

Treks vary from short three-day walks across relatively low altitudes to the three-week snowman Trek that covers 356 kilometers and climbs three of the kingdom's highest passes. Inexperienced trekkers are recommended to do the trek from Thimphu to Paro or vice-versa. Called the Bhutan path trek, it leads across the chain of mountains separating the two valley passing crystal lakes and offering perfect views of the high Himalayas outside of the monsoon season. More difficult treks take in northern villages and pass yak herders who spend most of the year tending to their herds high above the villages. The northern paths climb as high as 5,500 meters and should only be attempted by strong experienced walkers. All meals are carefully planned. Breakfast is always cooked and dinner includes a choice of at least four dishes. In many of the country, villages are scarce and few people will cross the path and as a result the tour operators take every precaution to ensure the safety and comfort of the trekkers in their party.

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07. Traditional Medicine



(Flowers are widely used as ingredient in Traditional Medicine)

Health care in Bhutan is free for both Bhutanese and visitors. The health systems have evolved into a fusion of traditional and modern medicine and it is not uncommon that a patient would consult both the modern and the indigenous physician.

Treatment using herbs, plant extracts, and animal organs is still common in villages in Bhutan. There are village mystics or Tshampa, who through tradition have learned to prepare fine quality concoction of these traditional medicines. Which are sold, or administered to sick villagers by these Tsampa.

Traditional medicine Museum inside the Institute is place which shouldnot be missed. It has good collection of all plant, minerals, and other extracts which serves as ingredient for Bhutanese traditional medicine. Human physiology through this medicinal gives you rare insight into history, treatments, and the collection and processing of herbal plants into medication.

This rich tradition of indigenous medicine is promoted through education and research at Institute for Traditional Medicine in Kawajangsa in Thimphu. It is supported by 19 other indigenous dispensaries spread around 20 districts.

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08. Arts & Crafts



(Student at traditional art school)

Bhutan's arts and crafts reflect the unique identity of Himalayan Kingdom. Artistic tradition has its roots in Buddhism.

For centuries leaders and Clergyman in Bhutan are known to have popularized School of Zorig Chusum or the thirteen arts and crafts. This has greatly helped keep this arts intact and popular. All arts form symbolizes or tell one story or other. It is highly decorative and ornamental, and used as wall hanging in Dzongs, homes and temples.

Paintings and sculpture in monasteries are made by groups of artists working in special workshops executed by monks or laymen. The basic preliminary work is done by the disciples, after which the master carries out the finishing touch of fine details.



(Painting created by student that of meditating saint)

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The strength and vitality of Bhutan's traditional Buddhist culture is in clear evidence throughout the land in its arts and crafts. This heritage is seen in both the ancient and the more modern structures, images and artifacts. What is particularly remarkable is the overall sense of regularity, where there appear to exist only superficial differences between the old and the new. Craftsmen maintain age-old techniques to perpetuate a rich artistic tradition. Unlike many places on earth, in Bhutan the arts and crafts on sale are not made specifically for the tourist market, but are widely used by Bhutanese in both daily life and more direct religious practice.

The arts and crafts continue to thrive despite small volume of tourist. Much of this is due to the government's support and emphasis on the preservation of culture and tradition.

09. Unique Cultural Heritage



(Chorten or Pagodas lined up along highway)

Just as the kingdom's history is characterized by religious landmarks the influence of religion is highly visible in every day life of the lay population. Hundreds of sacred monasteries, stupas, religious institution, prayer flags and prayer wheels which dot the countryside is clear signs showing dissemination of vibrant Buddhist faith.



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Both in urban and rural Bhutan, religious ceremonies and rituals are performed regularly and with reverence. On auspicious days Bhutanese families make pilgrimages to monasteries to offer prayers and butter lamps. The horoscope of Bhutanese life is drawn from the scriptures on the early days of birth with series of instruction on how to earn merits. National and regional festivities, coinciding with the seasons, are major events for all Bhutanese. Buddhist world, thus, regards Bhutan with special importance. It is last bastion of Mahayana Buddhism.

Preservation of culture has been prioritized to ensure identity of Bhutanese in this globalized world. As a small nation, with low population, identity is an invaluable tool to Bhutanese. Efforts to foster cultural heritage is regarded important to ensure it is not eroded in the process of development.

Although both Buddhism and the monarchy are critical elements, it is the general extensive extension of tradition that is possibly the most striking aspect of Bhutan's culture. All Bhutanese continue to wear the traditional dress: for men and boys the Gho, a long gown hitched up to the knee, lower half resembles a skirt, for women and girls the kira, an ankle-length robe somewhat resembling a kimono. Generally colorful apparel, the fabrics used range from simple cotton checks and stripes to the most intricate designs in woven silk.