



Bhutan Orientation Packet



Paro Taktsang/Tiger's Nest Monastery

have fun. help people.

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Introduction to Bhutan

The Kingdom of Bhutan is nestled high in the Himalayas between China and India. Its storied history, unique culture, and beautiful environment are inextricably linked. Its development is based on gross national happiness, which valued higher than gross domestic product.

A serene country full of monasteries, lush valleys, rocky mountains, and pristine rivers, Bhutan holds more than what meets the eye. The culture of Bhutan is defined by the people and the government's determination to preserve and promote their cultural values.



Buddhism is the predominant religion in Bhutan. As a result, Bhutanese culture is very much influenced by sacred Buddhist values. Bhutanese live by their religious values and respect their gods and deities. Hence, there is no dearth of monasteries, shrines, and lhakhang (religious structures that house sacred objects). Dzongs, a unique combination of a fortress and a monastery, are present in every district of the country. You'll see sacred colorful prayer flags on hillsides and at the entrance of monasteries.



Bhutanese culture mandates that its citizens wear the traditional dress in school, in government offices, during festivals, and on important occasions. Bhutanese men wear Gho, a heavy knee-length robe tied by a belt. Women wear Kira, an ankle-length dress, sometimes with a short jacket. The small pouches on the front of the dress traditionally carried food bowls and small daggers; today they generally hold cell phones.

You'll find unique sites, culture, and traditions at every turn. When a child is born, for example, no outsider is allowed to enter the house for three days. It is only after a purification ritual that guests can enter. The name of the baby is kept by a local lama, and there is no family name as such. Instead, the name is a combination of two

traditional names, and the gender is usually indicated by the second name.

Projects and Expectations

Globe Aware works directly with a local grassroots organization created by His Royal Highness Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck and one of his childhood friends to allow select groups of guests to explore deeper into Bhutan. Reflecting Globe Aware's deep-seated commitment to local development and sustainability, all our experiences and projects support the kingdom's most important environmental, community, and cultural initiatives, including wildlife protection programs with the Royal Government of Bhutan and His Majesty's private initiative to preserve Bhutan's tangible history and empower local communities.



Thimphu

Over the past ten years, the population in Thimphu, the capital, has increased from 85,000 to 125,000 people, while the average age has decreased, due largely to people migrating from villages to take advantage of the capital's growing service economy — largely tourism. Young people often struggle to earn a living. While Bhutan remains one of the safer countries in the

world, locals have noticed an increase in crime and depression in this age group.

Teenagers attend school but then return to their homes or sit in the main clock tower square with friends; very few extracurricular activities are available. This lack of programs prevents the youth from finding hobbies and developing ideas to help their personal growth. Thimphu has not been able to develop infrastructure to keep up with the population increase for this type of community program. Our goal is to construct and outfit a community center primarily focusing on youth. The center will have a library, indoor games, internet, printing, binding, and lamination facilities.

The center is designed to provide a positive, safe environment for recreational and social activities, programs, and projects; access to information on youth-related issues; and counseling and referrals for young people and their families. The intention is to help the youth become productive, responsible, respectful, and resilient citizens.



In addition to the community center project, larger groups of volunteers may also work on community-focused projects such as helping the Bhutan Olympic Committee build Bhutan's first baseball field for the youth in Thimphu; assisting with the construction of the city's first community-based library; restoring the 13th-century Jamtoe Goenpa, a temple in Haa District; or working on the construction of an animal rehabilitation facility in conjunction with the Department of Forest and Park Services.

Project specifics will vary on group size, needs of the community, availability of supplies, and weather. Smaller groups may whitewash temples with resident monks, help with trail maintenance with one of Bhutan's leading environmental stewards/activists; plant trees (Bhutan is one of the three carbon-negative countries in the world, thanks in large part to its trees); or

making Tsatsa—clay molds of offerings or memorials to the deceased—with monks.

Accommodations

Volunteers stay in a hotel with a distinctly local flavor, with Buddhist artwork found throughout, including large, colorful auspicious symbols painted on the walls over beds.

Rooms have free Wi-Fi, refrigerators, wood floors, flat-screen TVs with international channels, modern bathrooms, laundry service for a fee, room service, and complimentary coffee, tea, and bottled water daily.



Food

Vegetarian dishes—popular with Buddhists—and non-vegetarian options are available. Traditional cuisine includes meats such as beef, chicken, pork, yak, and goat. Dumplings and noodles are popular snack foods. The food of Bhutan is greatly influenced by Indian and Chinese cuisines. You will eat at the hotel, at work sites, and on excursions. All meals are included.

Leisure Activities

Volunteers have many opportunities to enjoy meals and activities with local community members in a truly immersive experience. Leisure activities include:

- Visiting remote mountain temples
- Taking scenic hikes
- Exploring the lush and untouched nature
- Enjoying cultural exhibitions
- Visiting the Tiger’s Nest Monastery (Paro Taktsang) just outside Paro, one of Bhutan’s most sacred and popular sites, where monks still live



Buddha Dordenma statue in Thimphu — one of the largest Buddha statues in the world



National Memorial Chorten

In-Country Transportation

The program has one van that accommodates a standard Globe Aware group size and can handle most transportation needs. It is intended to be used for the set program itinerary: getting volunteers to and from pick-up and drop-off points, work projects, and three to five planned but optional leisure activities. If a group chooses to split up and go in opposite directions during free time, volunteers will need to pay for additional transportation.

Money

The local currency is the Ngultrum. You can find ATMs for withdrawing cash at the airport and at banks and other urban locations.

Notify your credit and debit card companies prior to departure of your destination. Otherwise, they may stop payment and put a hold on your account to prevent suspected fraud. You should also contact your bank to determine international ATM withdrawal fees.

Please note that many credit card companies assess a 3 percent foreign transaction fee on purchases made internationally. If you have multiple cards, check to see if any don't charge the fee.



The currency exchange rate in your destination country fluctuates on a daily basis. You can check the latest rate at www.xe.com.

What Your Program Fee Does and Doesn't Cover

Your Globe Aware program fee covers your accommodations, meals, related transportation, program expenses, and certain planned but optional leisure activities.

Your fee does not include alcohol, gifts, souvenirs, additional hotel services such as mini bars or laundry, and tips. While Globe Aware also doesn't cover the following items, your coordinator can help you purchase them:

- SIM cards (up to LTE and 5G) (no e-SIMS)
- Pocket Wi-Fi
- Choice of traditional dress on arrival

Weather

In Bhutan, the average temperature ranges from 41° F (5° C) in January to 68° F (20° C) from June to August. December temperatures are between 43 and 68° F (5 and 17° C). Southern Bhutan has a hot and humid subtropical climate that is unchanging throughout the year. Temperatures can vary between 59- 86° F (15-30° C). Central Bhutan, with deciduous forests, has 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. The climate in Thimphu is mild. At an average temperature of 53 °F (12 °C), July is the hottest month of the year. The lowest average temperatures in the year occur in January, when it is around -2.0 °C | 28.3 °F.

| Destination | Avg temp | Max temp | Min temp | Clear days | Rainfall | Wind speed | Available to go | Festivals | What to wear |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--|
| January | 4.5°C | 10°C | -1°C | 29 | 14mm | 20km/h | ✓ | | ※Spring (Mar-May) * Sunglasses/Hat |
| February | 5.5°C | 10°C | 1°C | 29 | 16mm | 16km/h | ✓ | | * T-shirt and slacks * Sweaters * Warm coat |
| March | 8°C | 14°C | 4°C | 28 | 18mm | 15km/h | ✓ | Paro Tshechu Festival | * Hiking Boots for hiker |
| April | 12°C | 17°C | 7°C | 27 | 24mm | 15km/h | ✓ | | ※Summer (Jun-Aug) * Sunglasses/Hat |
| May | 15°C | 19°C | 11°C | 25 | 26mm | 12km/h | ✓ | | * T-shirt/Sweaters * Long pants/Long skirts * Boots/Softer shoes * Raincoats/Umbrella |
| June | 17.5°C | 21°C | 14°C | 28 | 54mm | 14km/h | ✓ | | |
| July | 20°C | 23°C | 16°C | 26 | 58mm | 9km/h | ✓ | | ※Autumn (Sep-Nov) * Sunglasses/Hat |
| August | 19°C | 22°C | 15°C | 26 | 40mm | 11km/h | ✓ | | * Warm clothes * Warm sweaters * Fleece jacket |
| September | 17°C | 21°C | 13°C | 28 | 13mm | 17km/h | ✓ | | * Comfortable shoes * Hiking boots |
| October | 12.5°C | 18°C | 7°C | 29 | 1.5mm | 23km/h | ✓ | | ※Winter (Dec-Feb) * Sunglasses/Hat |
| November | 9°C | 15°C | 3°C | 30 | 0.5mm | 28km/h | ✓ | | * Gloves/Scarf, * Warm sweaters * Down jacket |
| December | 5°C | 12°C | -2°C | 30 | 1mm | 30km/h | ✓ | | * Warmsocks * Sturdy sneakers |

Packing

From May to September, lighter cotton and quick-drying clothes are sufficient, plus a sweater or light jacket. From November through April, you'll need very warm clothes including long underwear or tights to wear under pants and a down jacket or coat.

When visiting temples, monasteries, and dzongs, Bhutanese people must wear traditional dress. To show respect, visitors should wear conservative clothing, such as long pants or skirts and a nice shirt or blouse that covers the shoulders and arms. You'll need to remove footwear prior to entering the shrine room in the temples, so you may want to bring shoes that are easy to slip on and off.

Please note that the following packing list is meant as a guideline. There is no single item that you can't live without for one week. Pack what you think you will need to be comfortable, but do not get preoccupied about items that you didn't bring or weren't on the list. Everyone has different opinions about essential items!

Packing List

- Work gloves
- Sunscreen
- Sun hat
- T-shirts
- Long-sleeved shirts (including one nice long-sleeved shirt for visiting religious sites)
- Pants for working, relaxing, and visiting temples
- Jackets (light jacket for warm months; down for cold months)
- Socks for a week
- Underwear for a week
- Towel for excursions
- Wet wipes
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Flip fops for showers
- Flashlight
- Money/credit cards for personal expenditures
- Lip balm
- Travel charger
- Toilet paper/tissues or wipes (available locally but if you feel you need a particular kind)
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Soap
- Shampoo
- Razor
- Prescription and nonprescription medication needed
- Umbrella or rain poncho (may not be needed—check the weather before you go)
- Day pack/Small backpack
- Secure document holder such as a money belt
- Camera and charger, memory card, or film
- Phone charger
- Portable phone charger
- Adapter/converter (see Electricity section)
- Plastic zip lock bag to protect your phone from water and dust
- Reading material and games for free time and flights
- Earplugs
- Refillable water bottle
- Swimsuit
- Sandals
- Snacks in zip lock bags

Blankets or a sleeping bag and towels may help you be more comfortable, as the bedding or linens may not be what you are accustomed to. The vast majority of volunteers find the sheets and blankets completely satisfactory and feel that taking up extra luggage space with linens isn't worth the cost or effort, though this is a personal decision. Others have brought "travel blankets" or "sleep sacks," which are more compact.

Laundry

You can request laundry services for a fee at the hotel.

Electricity

Electricity in Bhutan is 230 volts/50 Hz. Most modern electronics come with AC adaptors that accept from 100 to 250. If yours doesn't, you'll need a voltage converter. You'll probably need a Type G adapter as well.



Phone and Wi-Fi

Most of Bhutan has mobile phone coverage. You'll find Wi-Fi service in some hotels, including yours.

U.S.-based cellphones may not work in Bhutan. Before you leave home, check with your cell phone provider. If your phone will work, you'll want to arrange for data, cell, and text while traveling. Roaming charges can be expensive; you may want to turn off your cell phone or put it on airplane mode and use it only on Wi-Fi where available. You may also want to consider renting a SIM card (for unlocked cell phones only) or a cell phone to use internationally. Again, arrange that before you leave. Buying a sim card in Bhutan is also an option but again, this is for unlocked phones only. You can ask your program coordinator about purchasing a SIM card.

To get the most out of your trip, we hope you don't spend a lot of time on your phone or the Internet during your program. We will have a busy and short week immersed in the culture.

Your Fellow Volunteers

You will receive a Fellow Volunteer Report attached to our "Ready, Set, Go!" email about three weeks before the program starts. It will include information on and emails for your fellow travelers. Feel free to reach out to them prior to your trip to get acquainted.



Staff

Your coordinator is Kinley. His family is from the district of Wangdue Phodrang, a culturally significant location as it was the second capital of Bhutan.

He enjoys studying Bhutanese tradition and culture. He dreamed of becoming a tour guide since his school days, when he saw guests visiting the school park, a location for a perfect photo of the majestic Punakha Dzong.

He is known as a very likable and flexible guide and enjoys being able to provide his services to the best of his knowledge and efforts. He hopes to be able to serve the nation by presenting the magical kingdom of Bhutan to his guests which in-turn, he hopes, will have a ripple effect on the rest of the world. He is also a father and a very enthusiastic and accomplished archer.

Chechay, your primary administrative coordinator, has been in the Bhutan travel business since 2011. She developed her passion for discovering, exploring, and experiencing Bhutan when she spent time with a British family with four children touring Bhutan for three months. She discovered her country through the eyes of the visitors and since then has dedicated her time to exploring Bhutan and helping visitors experience her country. Chechay also loves to cook, bake, and knit, and has a passion for skincare.



Lhazin works at the intersection of sustainable development and social innovation. She is passionate about human-centered design and systems change. She spent most of her career in Canada working on program design, strategy, and implementation to support the advancement of urban innovation towards low carbon inclusive cities through policy, governance, and finance innovation. She has led national civic engagement and placemaking

programs, designed curriculums, and worked to scale the impact of social entrepreneurs. Lhazin holds an MSc in International Planning from University College London in the UK, and a bachelor's degree in international development and sociology from Trent University in Canada. A lifelong learner, Lhazin continuously explores new challenges and ideas from learning pottery, and Spanish, to joining climate hackathons and recently completing a Python programming course.



Arrival and Meet-Up

Your coordinator will meet you at the exit door of the Paro International Airport with a sign that says "Globe Aware." Our vehicles will be outside of the airport to transport you to your accommodations.

Gift/Donations

At the end of your stay, you might feel inclined to give something to hosts or people in the community who have been particularly helpful or courteous. In the past, volunteers have given a blank journal decorated with a child's name, written thank you notes, or sung songs. People also enjoy seeing simple tokens from your home, such as postcards of your hometown or photos of your family.

Please be aware that leaving donations can be awkward. There are situations where donations are more readily accepted, but often local cultural nuances can make the act of giving complicated. In some instances, receiving donations can hurt the recipients' pride. For these reasons, it is always best to first discuss donations—both the items as well as how they are presented—with your site coordinator.

Although we understand the good intentions of our volunteers, we strongly discourage giving any more money beyond the program fee, which goes directly to the program and community. Globe Aware funds are spent on program expenses, as opposed to cash donations—this helps ensure that the money is spent in meaningful ways that help the whole community. We've found that giving cash, in the long run, does more harm than good. It contradicts Globe Aware's goal of promoting sustainability, builds expectations that foreigners are “made of money,” and fosters the practice of begging to solve a community's challenges.

You are absolutely not expected to donate anything. You may, however, want to leave personal items you used during the program but no longer need, if the community could use them. Often gifts such as these are welcome:

- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Shampoo
- Soap
- Linens
- Kitchen utensils
- Flashlight with batteries
- Children's books
- Shoes and flip flops
- Underwear
- T-shirts
- Socks
- Other clothing
- School supplies like pencils, pen, erasers, rulers, and notepads
- Educational toys or toys that do not require batteries, such as UNO, Connect Four, jump ropes, hockey sticks, frisbees, balls, and jerseys or uniforms of your international team

We discourage the donation of candy and other non-essential items.

Health

You should be up to date on routine vaccinations while traveling to any destination. No special vaccines are required to travel to Bhutan unless you are traveling from or through a country with a high prevalence of yellow fever. For additional information, please refer to the CDC's website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/bhutan>.

In case of medical concerns, a hospital is within easy driving distance from our program site.

Health Insurance

Globe Aware participants are automatically enrolled in the CORE Travel Medical Insurance program while on a Globe Aware trip. See your Volunteer Handbook for more details. You may upgrade your insurance option to suit your preferences with four different plans. You can choose a coverage plan with more valuable benefits, get higher

limits of trip cancellation coverage, add baggage insurance, and purchase extensions that cover you for international travel you might want to do it immediately before or after your Globe Aware program.

To review your coverage, information on benefits, and upgrade options, log on to the Core Travel Insurance website at www.coretravelinsurance.com/login/. Enter your first and last name, date of birth, and under the organization, type in Globe Aware. If you have any issues logging in, please contact Globe Aware's office at 877-588-4562 or 214-824-4562.

For medical emergencies, as with most travel insurance, you would pay for the medical expenses and then submit receipts for reimbursement once you return to the United States. If the expenses are higher than you can pay for at the time, our insurance agents may be able to assist in getting you pre-qualified, but normally overseas health care is not as expensive as in the United States.

Safety and Security

Widely considered one of the safest international travel destinations, Bhutan reports some of the lowest crime rates in the world. For your safety, you will be accompanied by our local coordinators and government tour guides throughout your stay.

Arranging Your Airfare

Globe Aware has a local partner that can process flight bookings on Bhutanese airlines for you. For our local partner to process these flights, please submit your name as it appears on your passport and your passport number as soon as you confirm our trip. We ask that you book your trip at least 60 days in advance to get your visa in time.

Passport and Visas

Passport: A valid passport is required to enter and depart Bhutan. Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your stay.

Bhutan visa: You will also need a Bhutan visa. Indian, Bangladeshis, and Maldivian nationals can obtain a visa at the port of entry by producing a valid passport that is valid for at least six months beyond your stay. (Indian nationals may also use their Voters Identity Card, or VIC.) All other tourists must obtain a visa clearance prior to traveling to Bhutan.

Globe Aware has a local partner that processes Bhutan visas for our volunteers. You will need to pay the \$40 processing fee and submit the following documents to Globe Aware 50 to 60 days prior to the trip start date:

1. Copy of your passport photo page
2. Passport photo
3. Travel insurance covering COVID-19 (any amount)

Visa for transit countries: You are responsible for applying for and obtaining any visa needed depending on which country you transit through. As of early 2023, the primary ports of entry are through India, Thailand, and Singapore.

India is often cheaper, but you will need a visa to transit through India even for a few hours as you are likely to have airfare on two different record location reservations (because Bhutan airlines do not have relationships with all the major North American carriers). Most people get a visa within 48 hours of submitting their application. The process to obtain one online, in theory, is easy. But there are many fields of data that need to be filled out, the specifications for uploading photos are notoriously picky, and many volunteers report having to enter data over and over before it is accepted.

Volunteers transiting through Thailand do NOT require a visa for Thailand.

Foreigners transiting in Singapore will not require visas if they remain in the transit area of Changi Airport (Terminals 1, 2, 3, and 4) and do not pass through Singapore Immigration. You can check with your airlines directly or visit Changi Airport website at <http://www.changiairport.com/in-transit/> for more information on the transfer facilities available and

whether you are required to clear immigration for the transit. To avoid any unnecessary inconvenience or disruption to travel plans, we advise all volunteers from countries that require a Singapore visa to apply for one.

Customs and Immigration

On arrival in Bhutan, visitors must complete the Custom Form and hand it to the authorities. An abbreviated list is below; for a complete list of allowed and prohibited items, visit www.visahq.com/bhutan/customs/.

Permitted:

- a) Personal effects and articles for the visitor's day-to-day use
- b) Two bottles of alcohol not larger than a liter, 400 cigarettes, and 150 grams of pipe tobacco
- c) Instruments, apparatus, or appliances for professional use (must be declared on your customs form)
- d) Photographic equipment, video cameras, and other electronic goods for personal use (must be declared on your customs form)

Import and export of the following goods are strictly prohibited: -

- a) Arms, ammunitions, explosives, and military stores
- b) All narcotics and drugs except medically prescribed drugs
- c) Wildlife products, especially those of endangered species
- d) Antiques

Be cautious about opportunities to purchase old and used items. Customs authorities don't allow any old or used items not certified as non-antiques to be taken out of the country. Imports of plants, soils, etc. are subject to quarantine regulations. These items must be cleared on arrival.

Smart Traveler Program

The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service provided by the U.S. government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in an emergency, keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements, and help friends and family get in touch with you in case of an emergency. For information, visit [https:// step.state.gov/step/](https://step.state.gov/step/).

Global Entry

Global Entry is a U.S. Customs and Border Protection program that allows expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers upon arrival in the United States. Travelers approved through Global Entry can use automated kiosks at certain airports to reduce wait times. Travelers must be pre-approved for the Global Entry program. All applicants undergo a rigorous background check and in-person interview before enrollment. For more information, visit www.globalentry.gov/.

In Case of Emergency

Globe Aware's email is not attended all day every day, so if you have an emergency, please call this our 24-hour phone line:

214-824 4562

Calling from abroad, you may need to dial +1 or 011, depending on your phone service.

Stay Involved

As you leave Bhutan, you may be asking yourself, "how can I continue to help?"

Start planning your next volunteer vacation

Are you ready for your next volunteer vacation? Many of our volunteers are forever changed by the experience and can't wait for the next one. Maybe you fell so in love with the community you visited that you would like to go back. Or maybe you want to visit a new, exciting place. Get a group together, explore

our different destinations on our website www.globeaware.org, or return to Bhutan! All returning volunteers receive 10 percent off our program fees!

Follow your program on social media

Join us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/globeaware>. Submit and watch for photos of your program, LIKE us, and continue to follow the progress of projects through other volunteers and their images.

Share your adventure

We'd love for you to share your Globe Aware experiences and photos on our social media platforms as well as your own! Your posts also help future volunteers decide which program is perfect for them and what to expect.

Your photos and videos may also be featured in our monthly newsletter, or you could win a prize from one of our yearly contests!

Click on the links below, follow or subscribe, and tag us @GlobeAware. We'll follow you back!

[Facebook \(www.facebook.com/globeaware/\)](http://www.facebook.com/globeaware/)

[Instagram \(www.instagram.com/globeaware/\)](http://www.instagram.com/globeaware/)

[LinkedIn \(www.linkedin.com/company/globe-aware/\)](http://www.linkedin.com/company/globe-aware/)

[TikTok \(@Globe_Aware\) \(www.tiktok.com/@globe_aware\)](http://www.tiktok.com/@globe_aware)

[Twitter \(https://twitter.com/GlobeAware\)](https://twitter.com/GlobeAware)

[YouTube \(https://www.youtube.com/user/lylejenish\)](https://www.youtube.com/user/lylejenish)

Social media is also a great way to learn more before your trip. Subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#), and find all sorts of helpful tips such as what to expect from a public restroom abroad, packing, and more!

Have a blog or channel?

You can e-mail us your website or channel, and we'll share your Globe Aware experiences!

If you have questions, links, or content you'd like us to post, e-mail our Social Media Manager, sikha@globeaware.com.

Fundraise

Start a fundraising campaign to support a program or project, to support your next volunteer trip, or to donate to other individuals fundraising so they can experience what you did!

Communicate with us

Please call us at 1-877-588-4562 or email us at office@globeaware.com to communicate any special needs you saw, project ideas, or other questions, concerns, or comments. We are always happy to hear from you!

Share your photos

Send us your photos so we can share them with other people in the same program or people interested in going to Bhutan. To share large files, we suggest using [WeTransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com) (a free filesharing website), Dropbox, or a Google photo album.

