



Pre-Departure Information

HIKER'S JOURNEY TO BHUTAN



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WELCOME!

We're delighted to welcome you on this adventure! This booklet is designed to guide you in the practical details for preparing for your trip. As you read, if any questions come to mind, feel free to give us a call or send us an email—we're here to help.

PLEASE SEND US

- Trip Application:** Complete, sign, and return your Trip Application form as soon as possible if you have not already done so.
- Medical Form:** Complete, sign, and return your Medical Form as soon as possible if you have not already done so.
- Air Schedule:** Please forward a copy of your email confirmation, which shows your exact flight arrival and departure times. Refer to the Arrival & Departure section of the Detailed Trip Itinerary for instructions. Please review your proposed schedule with Wilderness Travel before purchasing your tickets.
- Passport Photocopy:** Scan* a COLOR copy of your passport photo page and email it to us as a JPG or PDF attachment, or send us a high quality photocopy by mail (immediately upon reserving your trip).

**If you are scanning documents to email, we suggest a maximum resolution of 300 dpi.*

PLEASE CAREFULLY REVIEW

- Travel Documents & Medical Information:** Carefully review the Travel Documents and Medical Information sections of this booklet to familiarize yourself with Passport and Visa entry requirements for your destination, as well as any recommended inoculations.
- Optional Travel Insurance:** Review the Trip Cancellation & Transfer Fee Schedule included in the Detailed Itinerary. We recommend that all trip members purchase Travel Insurance.
- Final Documents:** Approximately three weeks before your trip, we will send you final departure documents, including hotel and local contact information and rendezvous instructions.

QUESTIONS?

Call: 1-800-368-2794, go to our **website** (www.wildernesstravel.com) or e-mail us at: info@wildernesstravel.com.

Travel Information

PASSPORT

A valid passport is required for your trip. Be sure to check the expiration date. Your passport must be valid for six months after your date of exit from Bhutan. In addition, we recommend your passport have at least two completely blank visa pages for every country you will be visiting. It is very important that the blank pages say “Visas” at the top. The last few pages of your passport, which say “Amendments and Endorsements,” and the final page of your passport, which may not have a page number, are not considered to be legitimate visa pages. The service of adding pages for visas was discontinued as of January 1, 2016. You can request a new passport through **US Passport Services Office** (<http://travel.state.gov/passport>) or use a visa service agency, which can take care of your passport renewal and expedite the process, if needed. We recommend **Passport Visas Express** (<http://www.passportvisasexpress.com/?affId=2120>). Be sure to allow sufficient time to acquire this before your trip.

It is a good idea to carry photocopies of your passport’s photo page and any acquired visa pages for your trip (if applicable) in case your passport is lost or as an additional piece of identification, as well as two extra passport photos.

VISAS

Bhutan Visa

US citizens need a visa clearance for Bhutan. Wilderness Travel will obtain this for you through our local partners in Bhutan. It is issued by the Bhutanese government ~2-4 weeks prior to your arrival, and we will send it to you before you depart. You must bring this visa clearance with you on your trip.

In order for us to obtain this visa for you, we must receive a color copy of your passport photo page as soon as you sign-up on the trip—sending this to us as a clearly scanned email attachment is best. If not, we ask that you send it via regular mail as soon as possible.

There is a Bhutan visa fee of \$40, which will be included in your Final Invoice.

Thai Visa

US citizens do not need a visa for Thailand unless they are staying longer than 30 days.

India Visa

If you are planning to visit India before or after your trip, a visa must be obtained well in advance of your departure from the US. Please call or email us for further details.

If you are a citizen of any country other than the US, check with a local consulate or tourist office for entry requirements.

MONEY

The currency in Bhutan is the Bhutanese ngultrum (BTN). It is best to carry most of your money in US dollars and exchange it upon arrival. Please note that larger denominations (\$100 bills) get a better exchange rate than smaller denominations (of \$50 or less). The airport in Paro, Bhutan, typically offers the best exchange rate, so we suggest changing your money there. You can also exchange currency at your hotel in Paro and Thimphu or at a local bank. Please remember to keep all currency exchange receipts; you may need them to change currency back into dollars upon departure.

As in traveling to other countries, it's a good idea to bring crisp, new bills (please note that no USD bills issued in 1996 or earlier will be accepted at any handicraft shop or bank). Some vendors may accept USD at their shops, but it is a good idea to carry some BTN with you.

Some higher-end or larger shops may accept credit cards for purchases, especially in the bigger cities, but surcharges will be added. If you plan to use your credit cards, please inform your credit card company before your departure that you will be using the card abroad.

At the moment, there are ATMs in Bhutan, but they do not accept foreign credit or debit cards.

You will need to budget spending money for gratuities, any meals en route to/from Bhutan, and personal items, such as gifts and alcoholic beverages. In Bhutan, wine (usually French or Australian) typically runs at least \$40 per bottle (or more!).

TIPPING

Tipping is completely discretionary, but over the years, clients have asked us for tipping guidelines to reward guides for outstanding service. A range of reference would be \$125-150 per trip member for the Trip Leader, \$55-75 for each assistant guide (one or two depending on the final size of the group), and \$50-75 for the drivers (one or two depending on the size of the group).

Please note that the Trip Leader takes care of gratuities for luggage handling, waiters at restaurants, and local guides who are with the group for only a short time.

SPECIAL DIETS

We will do our best to accommodate special dietary needs, however, please keep in mind that certain cultural differences or limitations due to logistics can make it extremely difficult and at times impossible to accommodate dietary restrictions. Please inform us at least eight weeks before your trip if you have a restricted diet. It is important to bring a flexible attitude and supplemental snacks.

COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone

The international dialing code for Bhutan is 975. Please contact your cell phone company for specific instructions for international use.

Email & Internet Access

Internet access is generally reliable in Paro and Thimphu but can be limited in Punakha, Phobjikha, and Bumthang.

ELECTRICITY

Bhutan has 230-volt current, 50 cycles. Plugs have three round pins in a triangular configuration (Type D) or two round pins (Types C, E, and F), but the most common socket configuration is three round pins (Type D). Please remember to bring a converter and plug adapter kit for appliance use.

Medical Information

The following recommendations should be used as a guideline only; consult your physician for medical advice. It is vital that you let Wilderness Travel know of any medical problems, allergies, or physical limitations you may have. Please fill out and return the personal medical questionnaire, and feel free to consult us if you have any questions about your ability to undertake this particular trip.

Wilderness Travel is not a medical facility and has no expertise or responsibility regarding what medications or inoculations you and your physician decide are necessary for your safe participation in the trip.

Traveler's health information is available from the **Centers for Disease Control**. (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>) Medical travel products are available from **Travel Health Medicine** (<http://www.travmed.com>) and from **Magellan's Travel Supplies**. (<http://www.magellans.com>)

INOCULATIONS

Entry requirements are subject to change; check with the Centers for Disease Control for updates. All shots should be entered on your International Health Card (yellow card), which is provided by the facility giving the shots. Keep it with your passport while traveling. This provides an important personal record for you to refer to when making future travel plans. We recommend you discuss the following with your physician:

Polio

People who have received the primary series of at least three doses of polio vaccine are considered fully immunized. People who are unsure of their status should receive the vaccine (three doses spaced at intervals).

Hepatitis

The vaccines HAVRIX and VAQTA (two injections, six to 18 months apart) give long-term protection against Hepatitis A and are worthwhile if you travel regularly to developing countries.

Tetanus Booster

A booster is strongly recommended (effective for 10 years).

Typhoid

The CDC recommends the shot or the oral vaccine, Vivotif Berna, a course of four capsules, one every other day for a week, with full effectiveness reached in a week. You may not be able to take the oral vaccine simultaneously with mefloquine (for malaria prevention).

STAYING HEALTHY

In hotels and lodges, do not brush your teeth with tap water; always use bottled water. Don't use ice in your drinks unless you are sure it was made with treated water. When in doubt, ask your Trip Leader for guidelines.

GETTING IN SHAPE

For your own enjoyment, we recommend you make a special effort to be in good physical condition for the journey by hiking, running, swimming, bicycling, or engaging in other forms of aerobic exercise well beyond your normal routine. Walking up and down flights of stairs is also an effective way to train for the steep ascents and descents in the Himalaya. Weekend hikes that involve long sections of uphill and downhill walking are great for conditioning your legs.

ALTITUDE CONSIDERATIONS

On this trip, you will be traveling and/or hiking at higher altitudes. Individuals vary widely in their ability to acclimatize. Since physical fitness does not confer any protection or facilitate acclimatization, it is impossible to predict how you will adapt to the altitude. The greatest protection is avoiding rapid ascents and allowing time for acclimatization. Normal physiological changes at altitude include headaches, nausea, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, irregular breathing, shortness of breath, fatigue, and swelling of the ankles and eyelids.

It is not uncommon to experience some of these symptoms when you first arrive at high altitude and then have them decrease in severity within a few days. It is important that you inform your Trip Leader immediately of any symptoms or discomfort, however minor, so that he or she can help you monitor the situation. While acclimatizing, avoid pushing yourself too hard, however physically fit you may be or feel. Pace yourself comfortably, rest often. You may find that you walk more slowly than others in the group, or slower than you are used to.

Diamox (Acetazolamide)

The prescription drug Diamox is now accepted as an effective prophylactic against the early symptoms of altitude sickness. Most people start taking it a day before going to altitude and continue until they feel they are comfortably acclimatized, although some decide to continue its use throughout their time at altitude. Consult with your physician for directions concerning proper usage and dosage. You can also read more about it at the Himalayan Rescue Association's website www.himalayanrescue.org/hra/altitude_sickness.php (http://himalayanrescue.org/hra/altitude_sickness.php). Please note: Diamox is not effective in dealing with more serious symptoms of altitude sickness and it is important you keep your Trip Leader informed of any symptoms you are feeling.

MEDICAL EVACUATION

Medical services are not readily available in Bhutan and helicopters are not used for evacuation purposes. In the event of an illness requiring evacuation, there are risks involved and evacuation may take several days. Trip members requiring evacuation are responsible for payment of all evacuation costs directly to our agent in Bhutan. Acceptable forms of payment are cash or credit cards. If you use your credit card, be aware that a service charge will be assessed in addition to the actual cost of the evacuation.

Helpful Information

SOUVENIRS

Bhutan has finely crafted handmade goods such as weavings and items made from bamboo, wood, and silver. Although they are expensive compared with those in other Asian countries, bargaining is not customary. Bhutanese stamps are also highly prized as collector's items. There are shops where stamps can be purchased in case Post Offices are closed.

Currently, you can bring \$800 of goods duty-free back to the US. Depending on your tastes, you can spend anywhere from \$200 to much more. Be sure to leave room in your luggage or bring along another fold-up bag for purchases. We don't recommend shipping goods home, as the process is complicated and unreliable. Wilderness Travel is not responsible for any shipping arrangements, even if you have enlisted your Trip Leader's assistance in making those arrangements.

CUSTOMS CONSIDERATIONS

Bhutanese customs regulations strictly forbid the export of antiques. It is also forbidden to take out religious objects (statues, prayer wheels, bells, and so forth) whether old or new. If you have already bought a religious object before entering Bhutan, declare it on your customs form when you enter the country. The Paro Airport customs officers may examine luggage as you depart. Always insist on obtaining a receipt with your purchases.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Camera Recommendations

With the many advances in digital technology, a simple compact digital camera or even your smartphone is capable of taking pictures suitable for the needs of most people. For higher quality images and the ability to use long lenses for closer wildlife pictures, a DSLR camera is well worthwhile, though heavier. Most digital cameras and phones have good video options, but you may want to consider a GoPro for a lightweight, waterproof option. Always practice ahead of time with new equipment and bring your manual with you. Camera equipment is available for rent from **Borrow Lenses** (<https://www.borrowlenses.com/discount/wildernesstravel>), with a 10% discount offered to Wilderness Travel clients. This is an especially good idea for renting large zoom lenses that you may need for just one trip.

Camera Accessories

We recommend bringing at least two large capacity memory cards or a small digital storage unit (or tablet) to back up your photos, freeing space on your memory cards. Don't forget to bring a battery charger and a backup battery so one is always charged and ready to use. For trips where you may be away from power sources for multiple days, consider looking into a solar-powered battery charger or buying additional backup batteries, and check that you have the appropriate adapter for the electrical outlets in your destination.

Sharing Your Images

We would love for you to share photos from your trip, and with your permission, may even use your photos in our marketing materials or on our photo blog. We request that you send us a small sample of your best images. Please email your photos to wtphotoblog@gmail.com or tag us **@WildernessTravel** on social media.

Photography Etiquette

When taking pictures of local people, be aware of cultural considerations. Approaching people with a warm smile and using polite gestures or simple phrases to ask permission to photograph them usually works well. It is always recommended to engage people in conversation before asking to photograph them, but if people do not wish to have their photo taken, please honor their requests. We urge travelers to avoid giving money in exchange for photo opportunities, which makes it harder for future travelers to have a meaningful personal interaction with local people. Please always heed your Trip Leader's guidelines for what is appropriate.

BEING A CONSIDERATE TRAVELER

Please show respect for the cultures we are visiting by observing local customs concerning appropriate dress, particularly in sacred places. Your Trip Leader is always available to answer any questions that you may have regarding this. If it is necessary to use a cell phone during the trip, please do so privately. Smoking is rarely an issue these days, but if you do smoke, please do so only away from the group.

Packing List

THE ESSENTIALS

- Air tickets (or E-tickets)
- Passport
- Bhutan Visa Clearance Document (sent to you by WT shortly before your departure)
- One other picture ID, such as a driver's license
- Expense money

WT GEAR STORE

To help you prepare for your next WT adventure, we've put together a great collection of top brands including Patagonia, Outdoor Research, Eagle Creek, and more at our **WT Gear Store** (<http://wildernesstravel.newheadings.com>).

LUGGAGE

- Soft-sided roller bag, with a small padlock (must be unlocked for travel).
- Daypack, large enough for a fleece jacket, rain gear, water bottle, camera, and other items you want on the trail. It should be a shoulder pack (not a fanny pack) with a supporting waist belt.
- Small roll-up duffel if you are an avid shopper, keeping in mind that you may have to pay excess baggage charges if you are over the weight limit.

IMPORTANT! Valuable or essential items such as camera equipment or prescription medications should always be hand-carried on any flight to avoid loss or damage.

WEIGHT LIMITS

Please note that for your flights to/from Bhutan, **there is a total weight limit of 66 lbs. per person**, which includes both your checked and carry-on luggage. Your carry-on baggage must fit into the overhead compartment or under the seat in front of you. If any of your baggage exceeds the weight limits, you may be required to pay excess baggage charges.

NOTES ON CLOTHING

Dress on the trip is very informal, with the exception of two or three hotel dinners for which you may want to dress up a little (jackets are not required for men). Basic laundry service is available at most hotels and guest lodges.

For Women

Shorts are frowned upon, but if you feel you must bring shorts, make sure they come to the knee (or below). Long baggy pants are comfortable and appropriate. Sleeveless shirts are not appropriate at any time.

For Men

Wearing running shorts or hiking bare-chested is not appropriate. Knee-length walking shorts are fine for men.

Dress Code for Entry to Dzongs

You will not be allowed inside a Bhutanese dzong (a building that contains government offices as well as religious offices) unless you are wearing appropriate dress. Both men and women must wear a long-sleeved collared shirt, full-length pant or skirt, and shoes with socks. You will not be allowed to enter wearing a hat, shorts, short skirts, slippers, flip-flops, or casual t-shirts. We recommend keeping a lightweight collared shirt (does not have to be a button-up—a polo shirt is OK) in your daypack. When entering the dzong you might be asked to remove your shoes.

Fabrics

Synthetics insulate and keep you warm even when they are damp. Polypropylene, Capilene, fleece, and other synthetic fabrics are excellent insulators and are far lighter than wool; they also have the added benefit of drying quickly. Avoid cotton clothing for hiking. Cotton is not a good insulator, especially as a first layer next to the skin. Once it gets wet from perspiration, it stays wet and keeps you cold. Cotton is fine for city wear and touring.

Shell Clothing

Your waterproof jacket and waterproof pants are essential to protect you from rain and wind. Gore-Tex and equivalent fabrics are waterproof and breathable, so they are the best choice. Your waterproof jacket and pants should be roomy enough to fit over other layers of clothing.

CLOTHING

The clothing list below is provided as a guideline only. Please try to keep your clothing and gear to a minimum:

- Hiking pants. Synthetic hiking pants are a practical choice. Jeans are not suitable because they are made of dense cotton.
- Sturdy hiking shorts, modest and knee-length
- Long-sleeved shirts. Quick-drying “travel” fabrics like nylon are ideal.
- T-shirts (synthetics are best)
- Full or half sleeve collared shirt (for dzong and monastery visits)
- Fleece sweater
- Gore-Tex waterproof jacket with a hood. A poncho is not adequate.
- Gore-Tex waterproof pants (preferably with leg zippers so they can be taken off without removing your boots)
- Shade hat with a wide brim
- Medium-weight waterproof hiking boots
- Running shoes, Tevas, or other comfortable shoes for city wear
- Hiking socks. Thorlo hiking socks (moisture-wicking synthetic with padded toes and heels) are excellent, as are SmartWool.
- Casual socks for city wear
- Underwear; synthetics dry faster
- Sleepwear
- Casual city/hotel attire
- Bathing suit for hotel pools (where available)

EQUIPMENT

- Good quality sunglasses
- Personal toiletries, biodegradable soap (toiletries are provided at many hotels, but may not be available at all of them)
- Toilet paper is available, but Kleenex packets are handy to carry

PERSONAL FIRST AID SUPPLIES

Every trip member must bring a small kit for personal use. Your own experience will influence your choices.

- Sunscreen SPF 30 or higher. We recommend mineral-based sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide because they do not contain harsh chemicals that are harmful to the environment. Brands such as Honest Company, Badger, and Alba Botanica are found in most sporting goods stores and drugstores.
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Aspirin, ibuprofen, or Tylenol for muscle pain or headaches, Tylenol PM for sleep
- Topical antibiotic (such as Neosporin) for cuts, bites, or sores
- Insect repellent
- Blister kit. Look for the long-lasting gel-type bandages that you can apply directly on blisters, such as Band-Aid Advanced Healing Bandages or Curad Gel Multi-Day Bandages. "Liquid band-aids," such as New-Skin, are useful because they dry rapidly to form a tough protective cover over a blister.
- Anti-bacterial gel for hand washing
- Antihistamine such as Benadryl
- Decongestant (daytime and nighttime types) for colds, sinus headaches
- Cough drops (for dry throat caused by altitude)
- Pepto-Bismol tablets for heartburn, diarrhea
- Imodium for diarrhea. If you wish to bring an antibiotic for diarrhea prophylaxis, please consult your physician.
- Prescription medications properly labeled
- Spare contact lenses or a spare pair of prescription glasses
- Optional**—Diamox for altitude acclimatization. See the "Altitude Considerations" Section of this Pre-Departure Information Booklet.

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Converter/plug adapter
- Camera, including spare camera batteries and memory cards
- Collapsible hiking poles. Hiking poles, such as those by Leki and REI, help to distribute your body weight, taking pressure off your knees and improving your overall balance. Many hikers like using one pole, while others prefer two.
- Umbrella for sun and rain protection
- Bandannas (good for protecting your neck from the sun and for use as a handkerchief)
- Binoculars (small, lightweight)
- Reading/writing material
- Your favorite between-meal snacks, such as trail mix or energy bars
- Kleenex packets
- Travel clock
- Money belt or neck pouch. Always carry your passport, credit cards, and cash with you in a money belt or neck pouch tucked down inside your shirt or blouse.

PROHIBITED ITEMS

E-Cigarettes: Please do not bring e-cigarettes (vaporizers), including e-cigarette refills. The countries of Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam have all outlawed the import and export of e-cigarettes (vaporizers), including e-cigarette refills. Travelers found with these items could be fined or sent to prison for up to 10 years if convicted. This applies for transit through the countries as well as entry into them.

Satellite phones are no longer allowed to be brought into India. This also applies to travelers who are just transiting through India on the way to/from their actual trip. If you bring a satellite phone to India, it will be confiscated and you could be subject to serious penalties, including arrest. Please double-check entry requirements on your own before traveling.

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