

The Lonely Planet logo, featuring the words "lonely planet" in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with a white circle around the letter "o" in "planet".

lonely planet

Bhutan

Best planning
advice

Off-the-
beaten-track
essentials

Expert
recommendations

If arranging tips yourself, hand them over in individual envelopes the evening before you leave, as things get rushed and easily forgotten on the day of departure.

For those paying their own way, most hotels charge 10% Bhutan Sales Tax (BST) and either 5% or 10% service charge, which are included in the rates shown. Most restaurants will charge the same, especially if you want a receipt.

Travellers Cheques

It is possible to cash travellers cheques at most hotels, any bank and the foreign-exchange counter at the airport. There are bank charges of 1% for cheque encashment. You should carry only well-known brands such as American Express. There is no replacement facility for lost travellers cheques in Bhutan.

Opening Hours

Reviews mention business hours only if different from these standards.

Government offices 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm in summer, until 4pm in winter, Monday to Friday

Banks 9am to 4pm (3pm winter) Monday to Friday, 9am to noon (11am in winter) Saturday

Shops 8am to 8pm or 9pm

Clubs Generally close at midnight on weekdays and at 2-3am Wednesday, Friday and Saturday

Bars Close at 11pm on weekdays and midnight on Friday and Saturday. Closed Tuesday – the national 'dry' day.

Photography

Photographic Equipment

Memory cards are available in Thimphu and you will have no problem finding an internet cafe in Thimphu or Paro that can burn digital images to a CD. There are

colour-printing facilities in Thimphu and Phuentsholing.

Many of the dzongs and mountain peaks are best photographed at a distance with a telephoto lens. Bear in mind also that there will be little or no opportunity for photography inside buildings, so you don't need to organise a flash attachment and tripod for that purpose. Be sure to carry spare batteries, as these are hard to find when in rural Bhutan.

Grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography* for more tips and advice.

Photography enthusiasts should check out the expert-guided itineraries of **Rainbow Photo Tours** (in the USA 813-839 4466; www.rainbowphototours.com).

Restrictions

Bhutan is generally liberal about photography by tourists. There are a few places, though, with signs prohibiting photography, such as the telecommunication tower

above Thimphu, and it would also be prudent to refrain from taking pictures of military installations.

There are no restrictions on photographing the outside of dzongs (fort-monasteries) and goembas (monasteries), but photography is *strictly* prohibited inside goembas and lhakhangs (temples). There are several reasons for this. One is that in the past tourists have completely disrupted holy places with their picture taking. Another is the fear that photos of treasured statues will become a catalogue of items for art thieves to steal. And thirdly, some early tourists made photographs of religious statues into postcards that were then sold, which is unacceptable to the Bhutanese religious community.

During festivals you can photograph from the dzong courtyard where the dances take place. Remember, however, that this is a religious observance and that you

PRACTICALITIES

Newspapers *Kuensel* (www.kuenselonline.com) is the daily (except Sunday) national newspaper of Bhutan. Private newspapers include: *Bhutan Today* (www.bhutanoday.net, biweekly); *Bhutan Times* (www.bhutanimes.com, Sunday); *Bhutan Observer* (www.bhutanobserver.bt, Friday); the *Journalist* (www.bhutanjournalist.com, Sunday); the *Bhutanese* (www.thebhutanese.bt, Saturday); and *Business Bhutan* (www.businessbhutan.bt, Saturday).

Magazines Glossy magazines published by newspapers come and go, but the most successful magazine in Bhutan is *Yeewong* (www.yeewongmagazine.com) aimed at Bhutanese women.

Radio Bhutan Broadcasting Service (www.bbs.com.bt) broadcasts English news at 11am and 2pm on 96FM. Kuzoo FM 105 (www.kuzoo.net) is a private English- and Dzongkha-language station with a mix of music and chat, or try Radio Valley at 99.9FM.

TV BBS TV broadcasts evening news in English. Satellite channels such as BBC World and CNN are widespread.

Weights & Measures The metric system is used throughout the country. In villages, rice is sometimes measured in a round measure called a *gasekhorlo*. There is a scale called a *sang* that is used for butter and meat.