



PARO.BHUTAN
PART OF THE COMO GROUP

GENERAL PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Please take time to read through this information; it is designed to prepare you for your adventure in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

Travel to Bhutan

Uma Paro handles the whole booking process on behalf of our guests, including flights and visa applications but it is advisable to book well in advance to secure accommodation and seats on Druk Air.

Druk Air

Bhutan's national airline, Druk Air, (the only airline flying to Bhutan) flies from Bangkok (Daily), Delhi, Calcutta, Guwati, Bodhgaya, Dhaka and Kathmandu to Bhutan

Return Druk Air ticket prices (as of August 2010) start from:

Bangkok Business	: US\$ 1154.00	Economy	: US\$ 960.00
New Delhi Business	: US\$ 1026.00	Economy	: US\$ 845.00

*Prices are inclusive of departure tax, insurance, fuel surcharge and handling fee.

*Prices quoted are approximate and subject to change without notice.

*Schedules are subject to change without notice.

Druk Air Tickets

Druk Air is the only airline that flies in and out of Bhutan. Please note that although Uma Paro is authorized to purchase tickets on behalf of our guests, Druk Air fares are subject to change. Also note that Druk Air tickets are refundable. If cancellation is made prior to 45 days of your initial travel date. You may also re-schedule up to one month from date of purchase. Uma Paro is happy to assist in the purchase of Druk Air tickets as a service, however Druk Air's policies are applied to this service and Uma Paro cannot refund tickets purchased on behalf of its guests. On receipt of payment for the full fare, guests will be sent a copy of their E-ticket via email.

Passports, Government Fees and Visas

In order to arrange a visit to Bhutan (under Bhutanese laws) all arrangements must be made through a local tour operator. All foreign travelers are required to apply for a Visa before entering Bhutan. Under the umbrella of our Bhutanese partnership and according Bhutanese laws, Uma Paro is authorized to organize visa applications. We require a scanned copy of the photo page of each guest's passport (this must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay) plus a completed copy of the visa form, which will be emailed to you. After completing the visa application form and attaching a passport size photo on the application, this document can be scanned and emailed back to Uma Paro, together with the photo passport page. It normally takes 2 to 3 weeks to process the visa but under some circumstances, we can accelerate the process to less than a week.

At the time of processing your visa the royal Government of Bhutan will require the payment of the Daily Minimum Rate, US\$ 180 per guest per night. Daily Government fees are: Royalty of US\$ 65 per person per day, FIT surcharge (FIT means "Free Independent Traveler") of US\$ 30 per person per day for couples or US\$ 40 per day for single travelers, this fees is waived for parties of 3 or more guests travelling together. These are compulsory daily fees for all foreign nationals except Indian.

The excess amount from the Daily Minimum Rate and the Fees, US\$ 85 (US\$ 75 for single travelers) per person per day will be credit to Uma Paro after your departure. Uma Paro will consider this amount as part of the deposit payment required to secure your reservation.

Additionally, foreign nationals (except Indian nationals) are required to pay a Visa fee (non refundable) of US\$20 per application (one name per application), and a US\$10 Tourism Development Fund Fee (which is used to aid Bhutan's infrastructure) of US\$10 per person.



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Tips for Passengers

As Paro airport is "daylight restricted" and totally dependent on weather, flights can sometimes be delayed. Passengers should keep at least 24 hours transit time for connecting flights out of Paro. Flights into Paro are also sometimes disrupted by the weather. To be prepared for such an event, it is advised to carry essential personal items like medicines, toiletries, minimum change etc. in your hand baggage (in a clear plastic bag).

Hand Baggage Allowance

Druk Air requests that passengers limit their hand baggage to one piece, the size not exceeding 45+35+20 cm (17 ½ +13 ½ +8 inches) and the weight not exceeding 5 kg (11lbs).

Checked Baggage Allowance

Economy Class: 20 kg (44 lbs)

Business Class: 30 kg (66 lbs)

Due to the limited hold space baggage is often left behind, most often from Bangkok. Bulky items should be booked ahead as unaccompanied baggage/cargo.

Customs

Please Note: Bhutan has become the first nation in the world to ban the sale and consumption (in public) of tobacco. While visitors can still bring in cigarettes for their own use the items will attract a duty of 200%. Visitors are advised to be cautious in purchasing old and used items. Customs authorities will not allow any old/used items to be taken out of the country if they have not been certified as non-antique. It is also recommended that you keep the invoice for any old or used items that you purchase in Bhutan in case customs authorities request them at the airport on departure.

Guests Flying via Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport

The Druk Air check-in desk at the Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International airport is at Row W at the far end of the concourse, to save time ask your driver to drop you at that end. Guests may like to stay at our sister property, the Metropolitan Bangkok (www.metropolitan.como.bz), as these Drukair mountain flights leave very early in the morning.

Guests Flying via India

All passengers flying to and from Bhutan via Calcutta or Delhi must apply for an Indian Visa prior to their departure if they intend to stay overnight – if they remain in transit no Indian visa is required.

The Effects of Altitude

At 2,300 meters above sea level, Uma Paro lies below the height where Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) might begin to affect people. It is caused by going too high too fast and in some rare cases can be fatal if the warning signals are ignored. It is important to take care, allowing your body time to adjust to the smaller quantities of oxygen. Some people adjust quickly, while others take longer, but very few people are incapable of acclimatization, given sufficient time. All our itineraries are designed with easy days at the start and some become more challenging towards the end, after acclimatization has occurred. To aid the process drink lots of water (3-4 liters a day), listen to your body and avoid over exertion.

Vaccinations, Health and Fitness

There are no statutory requirements unless you are arriving from an area designated as infected by cholera or yellow fever. Please consult your doctor or vaccination centre for up to date information and if you are on any prescribed medication that you bring a sufficient supply with you. As Bhutan is a remote country and Uma Paro is at altitude (2,300metres) we advise that all guests over the age of 55 years or with a pre-existing condition consult their doctor about their travel plans.

Communications - Internet, Mobile phones, Blackberrys

Most foreign cell or mobile phones will work in the Kingdom, however some PDAs such as Blackberrys DO NOT receive a signal as yet in Bhutan. Uma Paro's library has two desktop computers with free internet access for guest use and WIFI is available at all areas within Uma Paro.



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Travel Insurance

It is strongly recommended that you be insured against medical and personal accident risks (including repatriation costs, air ambulance and helicopter rescue services) and that you also take out cancellation insurance.

You should be aware that some policies restrict coverage or do not cover travel to Bhutan and may not cover activities such as trekking and mountain biking. Please ensure that your policy provides a sufficient level of protection and covers you for the activities involved. You must carry proof of insurance (e.g. your insurance certificate) with you to Bhutan.

Weather

In terms of weather, the Kingdom is a year round destination which in general experiences warm days and cool nights with temperatures only getting below freezing at Uma Paro on winter nights.

SPRING; March, April, May – warm days and cold nights (max 24°C vs min 2°C) with some chance of rain. Camping Trek Season (temperatures can drop below freezing at high camps).

SUMMER; June, July, August – warm days and balmy nights (max 26°C vs. min 14°C) with the chance of rain. Best time for flowers and birdlife

AUTUMN; September, October, November – warm days and cold nights (max 23°C vs min 2°C) with some chance of rain. Camping Trek Season (temperatures can drop below freezing at high camps).

WINTER; December, January, February – crisp sunny days and cold dry nights (max 20°C vs. min -4°C)

Best time for Mountain Views - snow may fall but won't settle for long at Uma Paro. In the Himalaya, conditions can be unpredictable. While we endeavor to run all activities as they are described below, and at all times of the year, our guides may suggest an alternative if the weather turns. This is for your comfort and safety.

Equipment and Clothing

In addition to your normal daily clothes, you will need to bring the following items with you:

Essential: backpack; warm jacket; good leather or waterproof fabric boots or shoes with good soles; waterproof jacket; sunglasses; warm hat; sunhat; sunscreen; day-pack to carry your essentials.

Recommended: trekking pole; gloves; tracksuit or thermal underwear (for evenings and in the winter); shorts for cycling; torch; insect repellent; lip balm; wet wipes, a sufficient supply of any medication you are taking. NB. Camera film is a rarity in Bhutan so bring your own supply which should be in your carry-on luggage.

Essential for Camping Treks: 4 season sleeping bag; torch; backpack; thermal underwear. (For a full trek packing list and more information about trekking please ask for a copy of the Pre Departure Information sheet for Treks)

Walking Conditions

Our walks and treks are mostly on established trails, and there are no particularly difficult sections, although some of the trails are steep and rocky and can be muddy and slippery after rain. Boots with ankle support and a trekking pole are recommended.

Biking Conditions

At Uma Paro we offer a range of both on-road and off-road biking trips to suit all interests and abilities. We have a range of KONA Cinder Cone ('08) mountain bikes, helmets and gloves so if you are interested in biking with us please advise us of your height as soon as possible to secure a bike for your size.

Transport

For transfers and tours we use small private minibuses and 4 x 4 vehicles such as Hyundai Santa Fee depending on the size of the party.

Currency

The Bhutanese unit of currency is the Ngultrum and 1Nu = 100 Chetrum. The Ngultrum is pegged to the value of the Indian Rupee and at 01/08/2010 was worth the following:

1 \$US = 44.30 Nu	1 UKP = 72.00 Nu	1 Euro = 62.80 Nu
1 \$Sing = 34.95 Nu	1 Japanese Yen = 0.50 Nu	

There is a foreign currency exchange facility at the Front Desk of Uma Paro but please note that while very few businesses in Bhutan take credit cards and there are still no international ATMs, Uma Paro now has the facility to do so. Please also note that while Indian Rupee currency can be used in Bhutan the Bhutan Monetary Authority does not allow 500 and 1,000 Rupee notes to be traded in Bhutan. Also please note that Thai Bhat cannot be exchanged in Bhutan by order of the Bhutan Monetary Authority.

Electricity

220 volts AC. A limited supply of transformers is available for appliances of different voltages. The power points are fitted with multi plugs.

Local Time

Local time is 6 hours ahead of Greenwich Meantime (London UK time), 30 minutes ahead of India and 1 hour behind Thailand.

Language

Dzongkha is Bhutan's official language and there are countless dialects. English is widely spoken in shops and hotels.

Things to Buy

The choice is quite limited but improving and includes textiles, wooden handicrafts, paintings, prayer flags, prayer wheels, prayer beads and very colorful stamps. Paro Market day is every Sunday and Thimphu Market (with its extensive handicraft and artifact section) opens on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Extra Expenses and Spending Money

Apart from extra massage therapies and activities, drinks, souvenirs, tips, essential items and the items for sale in the Uma Paro shop there is little available to spend your money on.

Business Hours

Saturday and Sunday are the weekly days off for all Government Offices and some shops are closed however in the private sector the day off is Sunday. Please note that the National Museum in Paro is closed on Sundays and Mondays.

Suggested Reading List

Treasures of the Thunder Dragon: A Portrait of Bhutan by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Queen of Bhutan
A captivating blend of personal memoir, history, folklore and travelogue

Facts About Bhutan: The Land of the Thunder Dragon by Lily Wangchuk

A comprehensive guide to Bhutan published to mark the centenary of the Bhutanese monarchy (Uma Paro gets a write up)

Lonely Planet Bhutan 3rd edition (April 2007)

A general travel guide to Bhutan including trekking, information about Bhutan's ancient Buddhist culture (Uma Paro gets a write up)

Raven Crown: Origins of the Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan by Michael Aris



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Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Kingdom

212 pages and over a hundred photographs of the Himalayan kingdom

Beyond the Sky and the Earth: A Journey into Bhutan by Jamie Zeppa

Zeppa's fascinating account of her time as a volunteer schoolteacher in Bhutan.

The Blessings of Bhutan (A Latitude 20 Book) by Russ and Blyth Carpenter

A personal and fascinating compilation of essays about the authors' experiences and understanding of Bhutanese life.

Other Media

www.kuenselonline.com www.bhutanobserver.bt www.bhutantimes.bt - websites for the three national newspapers

Travellers and Magicians – a wonderfully evocative Bhutanese made film

Little Buddha – some of the scenes for this Hollywood film were shot in and around Paro

Package Inclusions

If you have booked one of Uma Paro's packages, please refer to your accompanying itinerary sheet for a comprehensive breakdown.

Final Checklist

- Air Tickets
- Passport
- Visa for Bhutan
- Copy of Travel Insurance document
- Cash and/or Travelers' Cheques
- Essential for Camping Treks: 4 season sleeping bag; torch; backpack; thermal underwear.

Uma Paro Contact Details

Uma Paro
PO Box 222
Paro
Bhutan

Email: info.paro@uma.como.bz (Press) res.paro@uma.como.bz (Reservations)

Telephone: 00 975 (0) 8 271597 Fax: 00 975 (0) 8 271513

Direct line for Reservation: 00 975 (0) 8 271609 (Open from 9Am - 10 Pm Daily, on Sunday from 9Am - 6PM)

To dial out of Bhutan: 00 + country code + number

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IMPORTANT NOTE

The information in these notes is given in good faith, and covers the average range of conditions likely to be found on this trip. In remote destinations abnormal conditions can prevail at any time, and all adventurous holidays can therefore be subject to unexpected changes; in order to enjoy them we request that you be prepared to be flexible where necessary. For more information on Uma Paro, including the full range of itineraries and services (including tailor-made itineraries, groups and the hosting of special events) we offer, please refer to the website www.uma.paro.como.bz or email info.paro@uma.como.bz