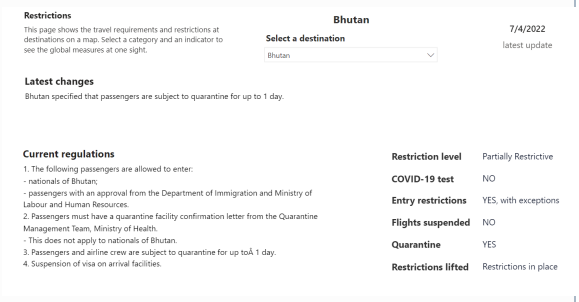
Bhutan

Source: World Tourism Organization UNWTO

04.07.2022



Restrictions

This page shows the travel requirements and restrictions at destinations on a map. Select a category and an indicator to see the global measures at one sight.

Bhutan

Select a destination

Bhutan

7/4/2022

latest update

Latest changes

Bhutan specified that passengers are subject to quarantine for up to 1 day.

Current regulations

1. The following passengers are allowed to enter:
- nationals of Bhutan;
- passengers with an approval from the Department of Immigration and Ministry of Labour and Human Resources.
2. Passengers must have a quarantine facility confirmation letter from the Quarantine Management Team, Ministry of Health.
- This does not apply to nationals of Bhutan.
3. Passengers and airline crew are subject to quarantine for up toÂ 1 day.
4. Suspension of visa on arrival facilities.

Restriction level	Partially Restrictive
COVID-19 test	NO
Entry restrictions	YES, with exceptions
Flights suspended	NO
Quarantine	YES
Restrictions lifted	Restrictions in place

Source: https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/unwto-iata-destination-tracker-easy-travel

Remarks from the International Road Transport Union

Forthcoming

Source: IMPACCT/UN OCHA

18.08.2020

Bulletin n° 2 - CIQP : 17 August 2020 (Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Procedures)

19.06.2020

COVID-19 [Bhutan]

Bulletin n°1 – CIQP : 19 June 2020 (Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Procedures)

IMPORTATION AND CUSTOM

Customs, land, sea (updated 7 May 2020)
A number of operational measures have been undertaken. This includes:

• Zero-contact Customs clearance procedures have been established at land borders where consignments and goods are brought into the country in foreign transport vehicles with foreign drivers;

• Health measures have been put in place by the government to contain the spread of COVID-19 across land borders through Customs entry points.

(Source: Bhutan Department of Revenue and Customs, 7 May 2020)

The contact points for the main border-crossing points are as follows:

Contact point for Paro International Airport:

Mr. Ugyen Tshering Regional Director, Regional Revenue and Customs Office, Paro, Bhutan. utshering@mof.gov.bt PABX: +975-08-272831 / 272832, Fax: +975-08-272830

Contact point for Land border Customs station:

Ms. Bumpa Lhamo Joint Commissioner, Head of Customs and Excise Section, Regional Revenue and Customs Office, Phuentsholing Bhutan. blhamo@mof.gov.bt PABX: +975-05-252356 / 252237 / 252253, Fax: +975-05-252224

Source: WCO/Department of Revenue and Customs

7 May 2020

ZERO CONTACT CUSTOMS CLEARANCE PROCEDURE; from a Landlocked Country perspective considering BHUTAN Customs Administration's COVID-19 containment measures

PART I: LAND CUSTOMS STATION

1. Bhutan's international trade landscape

Bhutan is a landlocked Himalayan country squeezed between two giants; China and India. Overall, about 95% of Bhutan's international trade substantially happens via land and only about 5% via Air. Further, due to very high Himalayan range and rugged terrain on its north, east and west, Bhutan's trade is largely with India from its southern land borders which constitutes about 80% of the overall trade volume. Goods imported into the country from countries other than India also transit via India.

2. COVID-19 pandemic challenges

Given the international trade landscape of Bhutan, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have posed immense risk and challenges to the cross-border regulatory and law enforcement agencies. On a positive note, it has led to a high-level border coordination and cooperation among all the border agencies, not only in Bhutan but globally as well. Due to immense risk posed by COVID-19 and strategic role Customs hold in the international trade supply chain, greater responsibility has been bestowed upon Customs to safeguard ones Nation at all cost. Under such conditions and given limited resources and technology advancement, Bhutan Customs initiated innovative measures to minimize risk. A zero contact Customs clearance procedures have been considered at the land borders where huge volume of consignments and goods are brought into the country in foreign transport/carrier with foreign drivers.

3. Measures put in place

The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) has initiated various response strategies to contain the community spread of COVID-19 and stop its influx into the country from across the border. Thus, putting greater pressure and responsibility on Customs especially at the land borders where the transporters/carriers are largely illiterate. To ensure a successfully containment, Bhutan Customs adopted innovative measures which are briefly presented below with the aim to achieve zero contact Customs clearance and release consignments with minimal interference by the Customs officials.

3.1. Zero contact clearance procedures (Overview); At a glance, loaded vehicles enter the customs area and documents are placed by the foreign driver themselves in the assigned drop box. The vehicle is then directed to transshipment bay to transship into the Bhutanese vehicle. While transshipment is carried out by assigned individuals in a planned manner using proper protective gears and maintaining appropriate physical distance,

the foreign driver is escorted to the temporary makeshift to rest and wait until the transshipment is completed. When the transshipment is done, the foreign driver will drive his empty truck and exit Customs area/border gate. Concerning the hard copies of the documents placed in the drop box (electronic declarations are also available), it will be kept overnight to contain the virus to the extent possible. In addition, Customs not only facilitate trade and clear goods but also makes sure that all the Customs areas are disinfected before and afterwards of the clearance procedures.

In the whole process, Customs officials have zero contact with foreign nationals with absolute physical distance maintained and follows disciplined process steps. Further, relaxation was enhanced for the physical examination unless any specific intelligence received or substantial breach determined.

3.2. Strict screening of travelers; Since the land borders being very porous and movement of people and travelers across the border with India being free, the entry and exit gates are under strict surveillance after the outbreak of COVID-19. Though the free movement of people being temporarily suspended, the Customs officials assist the health officials in screening the thermal temperatures for the travelers entering into the country.

3.3. Separate entry and exit point for normal vehicles crossing borders; As a functional requirement, various standard operating procedures have been developed designating separate entry and exit point for the foreign and Bhutanese vehicles crossing borders with the aim to minimize people contact.

3.4. Relief of Duty and Taxes (Section 47 and 75 of the Customs Act of Bhutan, 2017) To sustain Bhutan's fragile economy and to ensure an uninterrupted supply of essential goods into the country, smooth cross-border business/trade transactions are maintained without any hindrance. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the traders and business community at large, the RGoB deferred the payment of duty and taxes by three months (April-June, 2020) for identified importers importing essential goods categorized as basic necessity.

3.5. Customs administrative and service building cordoned To minimize the risk posed by COVID-19, Customs administrative and service building areas has been immediately cordoned. Only the pertinent service provider mainly Customs Clearing and Forwarding Agents (CFA's) are permitted to enter the area. Even the traders are barred from entering the service building. Further, the CFA's manpower has been reduced and their office as well re-structured in line with social distancing procedure.

3.6. Safety measures for loaders For the safety of self-employed loaders stationed at the Mini Dry Ports (MDP), protocol for transshipment of goods in the Customs area has been developed. The protocol entails loaders to maintain good physical distance amongst themselves at the time of transshipment, unloading and loading of the goods besides washing hands regularly. These loaders are basically the unemployed youth and volunteers who suffered loss due to closure of their business.

3.7. Other initiatives Use of Druk Trace App for "Contact Tracing" by helping with the identification of people who may have come in direct contact with a COVID-19 infected person while visiting public places or while using public transportation.

With the aim to reduce mass gathering in the office, the Customs officials mostly working over the desk or computers have been directed to work remotely from their residence.

Beside mentioned above, Bhutan Customs has also put into practice the WCO indicative list of harmonized codes shared as supplementary note for emergency supplies.

Ensuring uninterrupted supply chain during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Facilitating the Cross-border Movement of Relief and Essential Supplies
- Supporting the Economy and Sustaining Supply Chain Continuity
- Protecting Officials Protecting Society
- Coordinate and cooperate with other government agencies in facilitating smooth and faster clearance of goods.
- To maintain continuity and minimize interruption in the supply chain, the working hours extended beyond the normal working hours.
- Provide personal protection equipment to Officials, such as masks, gloves, sanitizers, etc.
- Rendering helping hand in checking the temperature of all incoming travelers.
- Clearance priority given to the essential goods.
- Introduced facilitative measures by accepting the documents in copy.
- Apply social distancing measures.
- Identified different entry and exit for Foreign Vehicle and National Vehicle thus, ensuring zero contact.
- The import clearance procedure has been simplified to expedite the movement of consignment.
- Liaising frequently with the Indian counter parts and Liaison Transit Offices located outside the county in facilitating the clearance of consignment which is of paramount importance for the government and public at large during this critical situation.
- Follow zero contact release protocol.
- Identified designated resting place for Foreign National Drivers.

PART II: INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

4. Customs clearance objectives and principles during COVID 19:

- To ensure Zero physical contact for Customs clearance.
- To focus on preventive and safety measures.
- To fast track service delivery with reduced workforce.
- To keep Cargos in temporary storage for a minimum of 24 hrs. before clearance.

5. Clearance of Passenger

- Coordination with the airport facilitation committee on the clearance of passenger;
- Assist in clearance of Relief flights bringing in Bhutanese Citizens from rest of the world;
- Minimal check and fast track clearance of passengers;
- Assist airport authorities in temperature scanning of passengers; and
- Sanitization of offices, cargo, baggage and belts (carousals) by the Air Transport authorities in consultations with the Health and Quarantine authorities.

6. Clearance of Cargo

- Coordination with the airport facilitation committee on the clearance of goods;
- Fast track clearance of all essential cargos relating to COVID-19 such as testing kit, PPE, Ventilators, Hand sanitizer, medicines and other equipments (Section 75 of the Customs Act of Bhutan 2017);
- Clearances of relief consignments and donations based on government directives;
- Deferment of import duties and taxes on essential goods;
- Airway bill and invoice-based clearance.

7. Separate Record keeping

- Separate record and details of health procurement, relief consignments and other normal cargos;
- Record of duties and taxes deferment;
- Sharing of the information with relevant stakeholders for proper coordination and effective service delivery.

8. Communication protocol and use of Technology

- Use of Druk Trace App for “Contact Tracing” by helping with the identification of people who may have come in direct contact with a COVID-19 infected person.
- Coordination on relief flights, exchange of passenger information and cargo manifest;
- Use of social media applications like WhatsApp group, Telegram and WeChat for coordination and effective communication amongst officials and stakeholders;

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CHECK THE FOLLOWING:

- Contact point for Paro International Airport: Mr. Ugyen Tshering, Regional Director, Regional Revenue and Customs Office, Paro, Bhutan. utshering@mof.gov.bt PABX: +975-08-272831 / 272832, Fax: +975-08-272830

- Contact point for Land border Customs station:

Ms. Bumpa Lhamo, Joint Commissioner, Head of Customs and Excise Section, Regional Revenue and Customs Office, Phuentsholing Bhutan. blhamo@mof.gov.bt PABX: +975-05-252356 / 252237 / 252253, Fax: +975-05-252224

- For detailed contact addresses, please visit: http://portal.drc.gov.bt/drc/node/100.

- For more information about Bhutan Customs administrations, please visit www.drc.gov.bt.

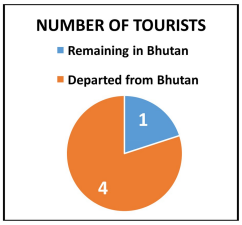
- For the Fiscal and Monetary measures notification issued by the Ministry of Finance, Royal Government of Bhutan in the wake COVID-19 outbreak, please visit: http://portal.drc.gov.bt/drc/sites/default/files/Notification_FM_MoF_03_2020.pdf OR https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NOTIFICATION2803202001.pdf.

- For an overall information on the COVID-19 situation in Bhutan, please visit www.moh.gov.bt.

Source: Tourism Council of Bhutan

23.03.2020

Tourism Bhutan Situation Report on COVID-19 as of 23rd March, 2020



DISTRIBUTION OF TOURISTS	
Thimphu	1

Tourism Sites

- Kichu Lhakhang closed till 24/03/2020
- Jungshi handmade paper factory closed till 21/03/2020
- National Institute for Zorig Chusum closed till 21/03/2020
- Changangkha Lhakhang entry allowed till courtyard
- Simply Bhutan closed till 21/03/2020

Flight Schedule

- For Drukair schedule please call # 1300
- Bhutan Airlines has suspended their flights. Please call # 1234 for more information

Questions and Answers

A set of questions and answers for tourism partners is available under "Announcements" on both www.tourism.gov.bt and various social media platforms.

TOURISM COUNCIL OF BHUTAN
With support from the ABTO, GAB and HRAB

The Kingdom of Bhutan remained largely cut off from the rest of the world up until the early 1960's. Entering the country was difficult as it was only accessible by foot from two main entry points, one in the North and another from the South. The Northern route was through Tibet, crossing high mountain passes that were inaccessible throughout the winters. The second entry route from the South came through the plains of Assam and West Bengal. The high frozen passes in the North and the dense jungles in the South made it extremely difficult to enter the country.

However, carefully planned economic development has made the country much more accessible and there are now a network of roads entering and traversing the country, as well as one international and multiple domestic airports.

Today the main roads entering the country are through Phuentsholing in the south, linking Bhutan with the Indian plains of West Bengal through the border towns of Gelephu, in the central region and Samdrup Jongkhar in the east, that link Bhutan with the Indian state of Assam.

Travel By Land

Phuentsholing, Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar are the only land border areas open to tourists.

The town of Phuentsholing in south-west is located approximately 170 km east of the Indian national airport at Bagdogra. After crossing Phuentsholing, you begin your journey to Thimphu, the capital city with travel time of about six hours for the 170 km stretch.

Gelephu, in south-central Bhutan, is another entry point to Bhutan. It is approximately 250 kms from Thimphu and the journey will take you through the sub-tropical areas of Bhutan before entering the alpine zone and then finally into Thimphu. One will have to traverse across three districts and the travel time will be about ten hours.

The district of Samdrup Jongkhar in south-east Bhutan borders the Indian district of Darranga, Assam and is approximately 150 kms away from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. The journey from Guwahati is about three hours. Tourists entering Bhutan through Samdrup Jongkhar will take you to Trashigang, and from there over the lateral route to Mongar, Bumthang, Trongsa, Wangdue Phodrang and then finally into the capital, Thimphu. The distance is about 700 kms and will take you a minimum of three days to reach Thimphu.

Travel By Air

There are flights to destinations that include Bangkok, Delhi, Kolkata, Bagdogra, Bodh Gaya, Dhaka, Kathmandu, Guwahati, Singapore and Mumbai.

Paro is situated at a height of 2,225m (7300ft) above sea level and is surrounded by mountains as high as 4,876m (16,000ft). At present two carriers operate to Bhutan, Drukair and Bhutan Airlines. There are also domestic airports in Yonphula in eastern Bhutan, Bumthang in central Bhutan, and Gelephu in south-central Bhutan.

Flying into Bhutan's Paro International Aiport is typically an exciting experience as the descent into Paro valley brings you closer to the mountain tops than most other flights in the world. The flight between Paro and Kathmandu is one of the most exciting ones as the aircraft passes over four of the five highest mountains in the world. In fine weather, as you soar higher up, you can enjoy the spectacular view of Mt. Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Kangchenjunga at their best.

With the exception of visitors from India, Bangladesh and Maldives, all other visitors travelling to Bhutan need a visa.

Indian, Bangladeshis andMaldivian nationals can obtain a permit at the port of entry on producing a valid passport with a minimum of 6 months validity (Indian nationals may also use their Voters Identity Card (VIC)).

All other tourists must obtain a visa clearance prior the travel to Bhutan. Visas are processed through an online system by your licensed Bhutanese tour operator directly or through a foreign travel agent.

You are required to send the photo-page of your passport to your tour operator who will then apply for your visa. The visa will be processed by the Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) once the full payment of your holiday (including a USD $40 visa fee) has been wire transferred and received in the TCB bank account. Once received, the visa clearance will be processed within 72 working hours.

At your point of entry you will be required to show your visa clearance letter, the visa will then be stamped into your passport.

Online Regional Permit System

In order to streamline and facilitate smooth visitation by tourists from Bangladesh, India and Maldives, the Department of Immigration, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs and the Tourism Council of Bhutan have launched the Online Permit System. The system facilitates the online processing of permits for regional tourists through registered Bhutanese tour operators and TCB certified hotels. The facility is offered as an optional channel to process permits for visitors from the region and is applicable for entry from Paro and Phuntsholing. Visitors who use this facility will be able to obtain their permit clearances and route permits ahead of their arrival in Bhutan similar to international tourists.

Source: https://www.tourism.gov.bt/announcements/tourism-bhutan-situation-report-on-covid-19-as-of-23rd-march-2020