How to Book a Tour to Bhutan: 5 Steps from Inquiry to Visa

Planning 9 min read

To book a tour to Bhutan you choose a licensed Bhutanese tour operator, agree an itinerary and a quote, pay to confirm and send your passport details, and the operator files your visa (US$40) and Sustainable Development Fee (US$100 per night) with the government. Your visa clearance arrives by email, normally within five working days, and the visa is stamped into your passport when you land in Paro.

The five steps below are the same whichever operator you choose. Byways is a licensed operator in Thimphu, so where a step depends on the operator we say exactly what we do. Ready to start? Send a free inquiry. It is free and carries no obligation.

How to book a tour to Bhutan in 5 steps

1. **Choose a licensed tour operator** and send your travel dates, group size, interests and budget.
2. **Finalise the itinerary and quote.** Agree the day-by-day plan and one per-person price with the inclusions listed.
3. **Pay to confirm and send your documents.** A passport scan and a photo for each traveller go with the payment.
4. **Visa and SDF are filed for you.** The operator pays the US$40 visa fee and the Sustainable Development Fee to the government.
5. **Receive your visa clearance and travel.** Show the emailed letter at check-in and at Paro immigration for your visa stamp.

Allow four to six weeks from the first email to visa clearance, and longer for the spring and autumn festival months when flights fill early. The booking timeline below sets out when each step happens.

Step 1: Choose a licensed tour operator

A licensed tour operator is the company that holds your visa application, books your hotels and puts a certified guide beside you, which the rules require at all times in Bhutan. Byways Tours and Travels is a licensed operator based in Thimphu, licence 1055548.

Your first message does most of the work if it covers five things:

- **Travel dates**, or the month if you are flexible. Flight seats decide a lot, so flexibility helps.
- **Group size and ages.** Prices are per person and fall as the group grows; children under 12 pay a reduced SDF.

- **Interests.** Festivals, hiking, culture, photography, a slow pace or a full one.
- **Budget**, as a per-person figure or as a hotel standard: 3-star, 4-star or luxury.
- **Where you will fly from.** Paro is reached from Bangkok, Delhi, Kathmandu, Singapore, Kolkata, Dhaka and a few other hubs; see how to get to Bhutan.

Byways replies within 24 hours with a draft itinerary and a price. Send your dates and interests and we take it from there.

> **Good to know**
>
> - Check the operator's name on the Department of Tourism register before you send any money.

Step 2: Finalise the itinerary and quote

Expect two or three rounds by email or WhatsApp. A good quote is one per-person figure that covers the whole trip on the ground, with the inclusions written out. A Byways quote covers:

- Hotels from the Department of Tourism approved list, 3-star as standard, upgrades on request
- All meals, from breakfast on day one to breakfast on departure day
- A licensed Bhutanese guide, a private vehicle and a driver for the whole stay
- Airport transfers
- The Sustainable Development Fee for every night, and the US$40 visa fee

Not included: international flights, travel insurance, museum and monument entry fees, drinks, tips and personal spending.

As a guide to the figures, the 4 days Bhutan tour is US$810 per person for two travelling together, and the 7 days Bhutan tour is US$1,560, of which US$600 is the SDF. Every tour page shows the price for each group size, and the trip cost guide explains where the money goes.

There is no deposit at this stage and no deadline to decide. You move to payment only when the plan is right.

> **Good to know**
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> - Ask whether the SDF, the visa fee and taxes are inside the quote. A lower headline price that leaves them out is not lower.
> - Festival dates follow the lunar calendar. If a tshechu is the reason for the trip, build the itinerary around the confirmed dates in the festival calendar.

Step 3: Pay to confirm and send your visa documents

Payment confirms the booking. Byways takes a single payment by bank transfer at least 30 days before the tour starts, with no separate deposit. Your trip is guaranteed once the payment has arrived, and the cancellation terms apply from that point.

With the payment, send the following for each traveller:

- A clear scan of the passport photo page. The passport should be valid for at least six months beyond your travel dates.
- A recent passport-size digital photo.
- Arrival and departure dates, and flight details if you have booked them.
- Indian nationals: a passport or Voter ID instead of a visa application. A birth certificate works for children under 18.

Anything the guide should know goes in the same email: dietary needs, medical conditions, a slow walker in the group, a birthday on the trip.

> **Good to know**
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> - Pay by bank transfer to the operator's company account, never a personal one, and keep the transfer receipt.
> - Travel insurance has not been mandatory since 23 April 2024, but we recommend it. Trekking tours need cover for altitude and evacuation.

Step 4: Visa and SDF processing

Your operator applies on the Department of Immigration's online portal, paying the US$40 visa fee and the Sustainable Development Fee for every night of your stay to the government. The SDF is **US$100 per adult per night**, US$50 for children aged 6 to 11 and nothing for children under 6, with the rate fixed until 31 December 2029. Indian nationals need a permit rather than a visa, pay INR 1,200 per night and have no visa fee. The visa and entry guide has the rules by nationality.

A correctly filed application is processed within five working days. Errors restart the clock, and the usual ones are a blurred passport scan or a name typed differently from the passport, which is why the scan quality in step 3 matters.

If plans change, the Department of Immigration refunds the SDF for cancelled or shortened trips, including any nights not spent in Bhutan, less bank charges. Requests go through the online visa portal and refunds are processed after you leave Bhutan. The US$40 visa fee is not refundable.

> **Good to know**
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> - You can apply yourself at immi.gov.bt. Most visitors let the operator do it so the hotels, the guide and the visa come from one file.
> - Bangladeshi and Maldivian passport holders can obtain the visa on arrival, but the SDF is paid the same way.

Step 5: Receive your visa clearance and travel

Approval arrives by email as a visa clearance letter: a PDF with your name, passport number and the dates of your stay. Print one copy and keep one on your phone. You will show it twice:

1. At check-in for your Drukair or Bhutan Airlines flight. The airline does not board passengers without it.

2. At immigration in Paro, where the officer stamps the visa into your passport.

A Bhutan visa allows a stay of up to 90 days; your permitted stay matches the nights of SDF paid. Your guide meets you in the arrivals hall, and from that moment the logistics are the operator's job. Our packing guide covers the week before you fly.

Good to know

- Check the dates on the clearance letter against your flights the day it arrives, not at the airport.
- If you decide to stay longer once in Bhutan, the operator extends the visa and pays the extra SDF. Give a few days' notice, more in festival season.

Booking timeline: when to do what

The minimum realistic lead time is about one month, set by payment and visa processing. Three to four months is comfortable, and festival dates need four to six because the two airlines sell out first. WhenWhat happens4 to 6 months beforeChoose the month, check festival dates, send your inquiry. Essential for March to May and September to November.3 to 4 months beforeFinalise the itinerary and quote. Have the operator confirm Drukair or Bhutan Airlines seats before you buy the long-haul flight to the hub.30 days before, at the latestPay to confirm. Send passport scans, photos and flight details.Within 5 working days of paymentVisa and SDF filed and approved. The clearance letter is emailed to you.1 to 2 weeks beforeCheck the letter against your flights, arrange travel insurance, pack.Travel dayClearance letter at check-in and at Paro immigration. Your guide meets you in arrivals.

Popular itinerary lengths

How long do you need? Two patterns cover most first visits:

The Essentials

4–5 Days

1. **Paro**Arrival & dzong visit
2. **Thimphu**The capital — Buddha Dordenma & markets
3. **Tiger's Nest Monastery**The famous cliffside hike

4 Days Bhutan Tour

5 Days Bhutan Tour

The Classic Circuit

6–8 Days

1. **Paro & Thimphu**Everything from the essentials

2. **Punakha** The riverside dzong & Dochula Pass
3. **Scenic valleys** Phobjikha & nearby glacial valleys
4. **Tiger's Nest Monastery** Saved for the grand finale

6 Days

7 Days

8 Days

Ready to start?

Send a free inquiry and a Bhutanese travel expert plans the trip with you — free and no obligation.

Send Inquiry

Or browse all our tours first.

Frequently Asked Questions

How far in advance should I book a tour to Bhutan?

> At least one month, which is the time payment and visa processing need. Three to four months is comfortable. For festival dates and the peak months of March to May and September to November, book four to six months ahead, because Drukair and Bhutan Airlines seats sell out first.

Do I need a tour operator to book a trip to Bhutan?

> No. Since September 2022 visitors may apply for the visa themselves and book directly. A certified guide must still accompany you at all times, and you may only stay in hotels approved by the Department of Tourism, so most visitors use a licensed operator to arrange the guide, hotels, transport, visa and SDF in one booking.

How much does it cost to book a tour to Bhutan?

> With Byways the 4 days Bhutan tour is US$810 per person for two travelling together and the 7 days tour is US$1,560. Those figures include the Sustainable Development Fee of US$100 per night, the US$40 visa fee, hotels, all meals, a licensed guide and a private vehicle. International flights are extra.

Do I have to pay a deposit to book a Bhutan tour?

> It depends on the operator. Byways does not take a deposit: a single payment by bank transfer at least 30 days before the tour confirms the trip. Cancellations more than 30 days before arrival are refunded in full minus processing fees, with smaller refunds closer to the date, as set out in our terms.

How long does the Bhutan visa take?

> A correctly filed application is processed within five working days. The clearance letter is emailed to you, and the visa itself is stamped into your passport when you arrive in Paro.

What documents do I need to book a tour to Bhutan?

A clear scan of your passport photo page, valid for at least six months beyond your travel dates, a recent passport-size digital photo, and your arrival and departure dates. Indian nationals use a passport or Voter ID instead of a visa application.

Can Indian nationals book a Bhutan tour the same way?

Yes. The steps are the same, but Indian nationals need an entry permit rather than a visa, pay no visa fee, and pay the Sustainable Development Fee at INR 1,200 per person per night instead of US$100. A passport or Voter ID is required, and children under 18 may use a birth certificate.

Is the Sustainable Development Fee refundable if I cancel?

Yes. The Department of Immigration refunds the SDF for cancelled or shortened trips, including any nights not spent in Bhutan, less bank charges. Requests are submitted through the online visa portal and processed after you leave Bhutan. The US$40 visa fee is not refundable.

Is travel insurance required to visit Bhutan?

No. Mandatory travel insurance was lifted on 23 April 2024. We still recommend cover for medical treatment and cancellation, and trekking tours need a policy that covers high altitude and evacuation.

Can I extend my trip while I am in Bhutan?

Yes, through your operator, who extends the visa, pays the additional SDF and rebooks hotels and the guide. Give at least a few days' notice. Extensions are harder to arrange during festival season when hotels and flights are full.

Need More Information?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts for personalized advice.

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