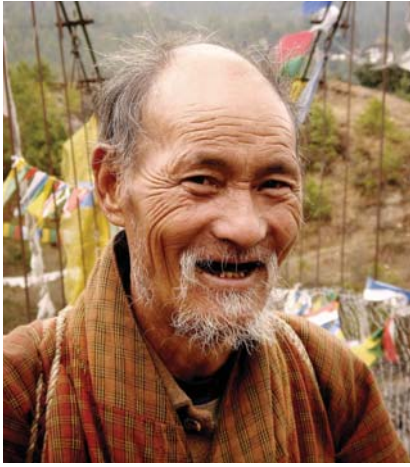


# gross national



Bhutanese gentleman, Paro



Bhutanese lady, Thimpu



Monk looking out from window



Bhutanese girl in traditional dress

*Gross National Happiness is a truly unique and very Bhutanese idea drawn from the Buddhist belief that the ultimate purpose of life is inner happiness. Here, Camilla Brent-Smith explores the origins of this rather unique idea and explains how this focus on people permeates throughout Bhutanese society.*

In Bhutan, the state of the nation is not measured by traditional methods such as GNP, but by the happiness and wellbeing of the people who live there. Though seemingly rather arbitrary measure, it is one by which the development of Bhutan has been measured since the fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, proposed the idea in 1972. Gross National Happiness is a more holistic approach to development within the country and tries to sanction planning that increases the quality of life of Bhutanese citizens, whilst respecting the nature and culture of the country, rather than relying on material possessions and consumption. This respect of tradition is apparent in the Bhutanese architectural style used for all buildings in Bhutan, the 17th century dress worn by all citizens, and the pristine countryside and towns.

Traditional Bhutanese clothing consists of a gho for men and a kira for women. The gho is a heavy knee-length robe that is folded to give a loose dressing gown style top and a slim skirt. Women can wear either a full or half kira, essentially a piece of cloth wrapped and folded around the waist to form a narrow floor length skirt, which is worn with a toego, a short loose jacket. The same clothing is worn for formal occasions but is smartened up with a loose white cloth draped across the body for men and a long strip of colourful woven fabric for women. Even with the constraints on their style of dress, the Bhutanese people ensure that their personality is apparent. The women wear their toegos in a huge range of colours and the men wear socks pulled up to their knees, generally in black, though you often see something a little fancier!

Jigme Singye Wangchuck was the fourth king of Bhutan before he handed power first to his son and soon afterwards to the Government. He ruled his people with a fairly orthodox view, based on the traditions of Buddhism and the ancient culture of the country. Even to this day there are no traffic lights in Bhutan, the first television broadcasts were only initiated in 1999 and internet service was established in 2000.

Despite these restrictions, the royal family remains incredibly popular in Bhutan with the fourth king and young fifth king pictured in every house, restaurant and on badges worn by many citizens. Travelling in his 4x4 on the Bhutanese roads, and recognisable from his number plate 'Bhutan', the young king is heavily involved in community projects. He spreads his time through all areas of the country, recently visiting the east to give the local people pieces of land from government owned areas. He studied at Oxford and has travelled the world, including Thailand where he has become a hugely popular heart-throb with Thai girls all keen to marry a handsome king!

Buddhism is an important aspect of Bhutanese culture and life with some 30% of the population of Bhutan living in monasteries dotted throughout the country. Often these are in remote towns and villages, though the dzong (fort) in each town supports a monastic body. The monks and nuns, with their shaven heads and burgundy robes, are a regular sight in the country and a visit to a monastery, especially at prayer time, is quite an experience. The Buddhism practised in Bhutan is a tantric aspect of other forms of the religion and means that there are huge numbers of sacred icons, phrases, gestures, and rituals. The ceremonies surrounding prayers are incredible, with incense burning and every monk in the monastery chanting. Instruments from long Bhutanese brass horns to heavy drums are played in time with the chanting, all adding to the atmosphere.

Bhutan is a fascinating country full of history and its culture and people are unique. There are some extremely modern aspects to it; this is a country where class has been abolished and where the female line inherits, but the ancient traditions continue to play an important role in the life of the Bhutanese people.

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**Camilla Brent-Smith**  
Bhutan Specialist

# HAPPINESS



Pilgrim, Thimpu



Men in national dress, Punakha

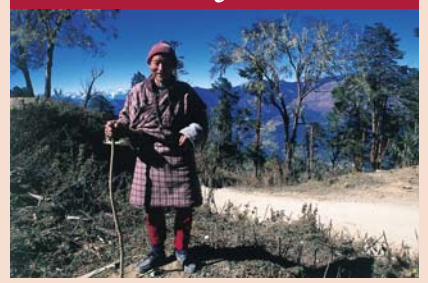


Local ceremony, Gangtey



Young monks at Paro Dzong, Paro

## FACT file



A seven-night tour including Paro, Thimpu and Phunaka, staying full board in comfortable accommodation costs from **£2,800 per person**, including international flights. A similar tour staying in 5-star Aman properties costs from **£7,550 per person**. For more information please contact our Bhutan specialists on **01993 838 320**.

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## WEB plus

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