Bhutan Visa: The US$40 Fee, Requirements and How to Apply, by Nationality

Planning

9 min read

> Every visitor except Indian nationals needs a visa for Bhutan, it costs US$40, and it is approved online before you travel rather than issued on arrival or by an embassy. Indian nationals get a free permit instead. The visa is the small part of the cost: the Sustainable Development Fee of US$100 a night is the large one, and the two are paid together. This guide covers who needs a visa, what it costs, the documents and photograph required, how to apply step by step, what differs for American, European, Indian, Bangladeshi and Maldivian passports, what happens at the airport, and how to extend. The rules are the Department of Tourism's, last checked 29 October 2026.

Do You Need a Visa for Bhutan?

Yes, unless you hold an Indian passport. Bhutan keeps no list of restricted nationalities, so every passport is welcome to apply, and every nationality other than India applies for the same US$40 visa through the same online system. Indian nationals are issued a permit rather than a visa, on a passport or Voter ID. Bangladeshi and Maldivian nationals need a visa but may obtain it on arrival as well as in advance.

Two things surprise first-time applicants. Bhutan's embassies and consulates do not issue tourist visas, so there is nowhere to go in person: the application is made online, by you or by your tour operator, and approved before you fly. And there is no visa on arrival for anyone except Bangladeshi and Maldivian passports; airlines will not board you for Paro without the approval letter.

Good to know

- The visa is tied to your travel dates and to the government fees for those dates, so it is applied for once the trip is fixed, not years ahead.

How Much Does a Bhutan Visa Cost?

A Bhutan visa costs US$40 per person, paid online when you apply, once per entry whatever the length of stay. Children pay it too. It is a processing fee and is not refunded if the trip is cancelled.

When people search for Bhutan's "daily visa fee" they mean the Sustainable Development Fee (SDF), which is not a visa charge but a nightly levy paid to the government: US$100 per adult per night, US$50 for children aged 6 to 11, nothing for under-6s, and Nu 1,200 for Indian nationals. The SDF is the larger figure and is paid together with the visa fee when the application is lodged; unlike the visa fee it is refunded for cancelled or shortened trips, less bank charges. The trip cost guide sets out the SDF in full, including the 24-hour border-town exemption.

On a Byways package both charges are inside the price you are quoted, so there is nothing to pay at the airport.

Good to know

- A seven-night trip for one adult therefore costs US$740 in government fees: US$700 of SDF and the US$40 visa.

Bhutan Visa Requirements: Passport, Photo and Insurance

The requirements are short. Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond the date you leave Bhutan, you need a recent passport photograph, and you need confirmed travel dates and a place to stay, which the tour operator supplies when it applies on your behalf. Travel insurance stopped being a condition of the visa on 23 April 2024; the Department of Tourism still strongly recommends it, and so do we, because medical evacuation from Bhutan is by air.

Two things are needed before an application can be submitted: proof of who you are, and a recent photograph. Have both ready as digital files.

1. **A digital copy of your identity document.** For travellers of every nationality this means a passport. Indian nationals who do not hold one may use a Voter ID instead, and Indian children under 18 without a passport may use a birth certificate.

- The passport must remain valid for at least six months beyond the date you intend to leave Bhutan.
- The copy should be supplied as a JPEG or PNG file.

Left, sent back. Right, accepted. A finger resting over the two lines of code at the foot of the page is the most common reason a copy has to be re-sent.

- **A passport-size photograph.**
  - Taken within the last six months.
  - In colour and portrait orientation, with your eyes open and your forehead and ears clearly visible.
  - Against a plain white background, with no border.

Left, too soft and washed out. Right, sharp, evenly lit, plain background.

Send both across to us and we will take care of the application itself.

Good to know

- A finger over the machine-readable lines at the foot of the passport page is the single most common reason an application is sent back. Scan it flat.

How to Apply for a Bhutan Visa Online, Step by Step

There are two routes, and they use the same system. A licensed tour operator applies for you as part of your booking, which is what nearly all of our guests do, or you apply yourself on the Department of Immigration portal at immi.gov.bt. Either way the sequence is the same:

1. Send your passport scan and photograph (or upload them on the portal) and confirm your arrival and departure dates.
2. Pay the government fees: the SDF for every night of the stay plus the US$40 visa fee. Visa, Mastercard and American Express are accepted on the portal, in US dollars; tell your bank first so the foreign charge is not blocked. Operators also take bank transfers.
3. The application is processed once the fees are received. A correctly completed application takes up to five working days.
4. The approval comes by email as a visa clearance letter. Print it or keep it on your phone: the airline checks it before boarding and immigration checks it on arrival.
5. The visa itself is stamped into your passport at the immigration counter at Paro airport or the land border. Nothing is paid there.

The visa allows a stay of up to 90 days from the date of entry and can be extended before it expires. Apply at least two weeks before you travel to leave room for a resubmission; for festival dates, book the trip four to six months ahead because hotels and flights, not the visa, are the constraint.

Good to know

- If Byways arranges your visa you send two files and we do the rest, including the extension if you decide to stay longer.
- A licensed guide must accompany visitors in Bhutan under the Department of Tourism's current rules, so an independent application still needs a guide and transport booked for the dates on it.

Bhutan Visa for US Citizens and Canadians

American and Canadian passport holders follow the standard process above: a US$40 visa approved online before travel, no visa on arrival, no embassy visit. Bhutan has a Permanent Mission to the United Nations and a Consulate General in New York, but neither issues tourist visas; the Department of Immigration in Thimphu does, through the online portal, and the consulate's own page says so.

Two practical points for North Americans. Fees are charged in US dollars, so a US card pays with no conversion. And because the visa is tied to travel dates, book the long-haul flight to a hub such as Bangkok, Delhi or Singapore and the Bhutan sector before the application is lodged. The travel from the USA and travel from Canada pages cover routes, timings and what a trip costs from each.

Good to know

- US passports are valid for ten years, so check the expiry: six months of validity beyond your departure date from Bhutan is required.

Bhutan Visa for British, European, Australian, Singaporean and Other Passports

The process is identical for every non-Indian passport: the US$40 visa, applied for online, approved before departure, stamped on arrival. There is no nationality-specific paperwork and no interview. Fees are charged

in US dollars, so a card that handles foreign currency without blocking is the only preparation.

What differs by country is the route in and the cost of getting to the hub, which the market pages cover: the UK, Germany and Europe, Australia and Singapore. Swiss and Thai diplomatic and official passport holders are the one exception, eligible for a visa at the port of entry.

Good to know

- Dual nationals: apply on the passport you will travel on. The visa is stamped into that passport and checked against it on arrival.

Bhutan Entry Permit for Indian Citizens

Indian nationals do not need a visa. They are issued an entry permit on production of an Indian passport or Voter ID card; children under 18 without a passport may use a birth certificate and must travel with a legal guardian. There is no fee for the permit. It can be applied for online before travel through the Department of Immigration portal, or obtained at the point of entry, at Paro airport or the land border at Phuentsholing, Gelephu or Samdrup Jongkhar.

Indian visitors pay the Sustainable Development Fee at the regional rate of Nu 1,200 (or the same in rupees) per person per night, with children aged 6 to 11 at Nu 600 and under-6s free. Those visiting the border towns of Phuentsholing, Gelephu, Samdrup Jongkhar and Samtse for less than 24 hours, and staying inside the designated zone, are exempt from the SDF until August 2027.

Good to know

- Carry the document you applied with. A permit issued against a Voter ID is checked against that card, not against a driving licence or Aadhaar.

Bangladeshi and Maldivian Visitors

Bangladeshi and Maldivian nationals need a visa, which costs the same US$40, but may apply for it in advance online or obtain it on arrival. The first 15,000 visitors from these two countries each year pay the SDF at the regional rate of US$15 or Nu 1,200 per person per night; after that the standard rate applies.

What Happens When You Land

The last step of the visa process happens at the immigration counter:

- **Documents ready:** have your passport and printed Visa Clearance Letter to hand. The immigration officer checks your details against the approved application.
- **Visa stamp:** your visa is stamped into your passport at the counter, which usually takes five to ten minutes. There is nothing to pay here — the fees were settled with your application.

What comes after that — the arrivals hall, meeting your guide, picking up a local SIM — is covered in our first-timer's guide to Bhutan.

Good to know

- Keep the clearance letter with your passport until the stamp is in. It is also the document the airline asks for at the check-in desk in Bangkok, Delhi or Kathmandu.

Entering Bhutan by Land

Bhutan can also be entered overland from India. Crossing by land changes nothing about the visa: **the same rules apply as they do on arrival by air**, as set out earlier in this guide.

Indian nationals are the one exception. They need a **permit** rather than a visa, and it can be issued at the border immigration office on production of a valid passport or Voter ID.

Which crossings are open, and how to reach each of them, is covered in our guide to how to get to Bhutan.

Extending a Bhutan Visa

A visa can be extended if the application is made before the original expires, through the same online portal and the same log-in used for the first application. Two costs apply: a fee for processing the extension and the nightly SDF for each additional night, both paid through the portal. If Byways arranged your visa we handle the extension too; mention it to your guide while there is still time on the original.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need a visa to visit Bhutan?

> Yes, unless you hold an Indian passport, in which case you receive a free permit instead. Bangladeshi and Maldivian nationals can get their visa on arrival; everyone else must have it approved online before travelling. No nationality is restricted, and embassies do not issue tourist visas.

How much does a Bhutan visa cost?

> US$40 per person, paid once per entry when the application is made, and not refundable. It is paid together with the Sustainable Development Fee of US$100 per adult per night, which is the larger part of the cost and is refundable if the trip is cancelled.

Is there a visa on arrival in Bhutan?

> Only for Bangladeshi and Maldivian passport holders. All other nationalities must hold an approved visa clearance before departure; the airline checks it before boarding and the visa is stamped into the passport on arrival at Paro or the land border.

Do US citizens need a visa for Bhutan?

Yes. Americans apply online like every other non-Indian nationality, pay US$40 plus the Sustainable Development Fee, and receive a clearance letter by email before travel. There is no visa on arrival and the consulate in New York does not issue tourist visas.

How long does a Bhutan visa take?

Up to five working days once the fees are received, for a correctly completed application. Apply at least two weeks before travel. Most of our guests have the clearance letter within a few days of sending their passport scan and photo.

Do Indian citizens need a visa for Bhutan?

No. Indian nationals receive an entry permit, free of charge, on an Indian passport or Voter ID, either online before travel or at the point of entry. Children under 18 may use a birth certificate with a legal guardian. The Sustainable Development Fee of Nu 1,200 per person per night still applies.

Is travel insurance required for a Bhutan visa?

Not since 23 April 2024, when the Department of Tourism lifted the requirement. It remains strongly recommended, because serious medical cases are evacuated by air to Bangkok or Delhi.

Can I apply for a Bhutan visa myself without a tour operator?

Yes, on the Department of Immigration portal at immi.gov.bt, paying the fees by card. A licensed guide must still accompany you in Bhutan under current rules, so most visitors let their operator lodge the visa with the booking.

Need More Information?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts for personalized advice.

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