What to Pack for Bhutan: The Ultimate 2026 Guide

Planning 7 min read

> Packing for Bhutan is unique because you aren't just preparing for the weather—you're preparing for a specific cultural etiquette. In the "Land of the Thunder Dragon," the elevation can swing from 200m to over 7,000m, and the dress code is as sacred as the mountains. Here is exactly what you need to stay comfortable, respectful, and prepared.

The "Monastery-Ready" Dress Code

When visiting Dzongs (fortresses), temples, or government offices, Bhutanese authorities enforce a strict dress code. **If you are not dressed appropriately, you may be denied entry.**

- **Shoulders & Knees:** Must be covered at all times.
- **Tops:** Long-sleeved shirts or blouses are preferred. T-shirts are usually okay if they have a collar (polo style), but sleeveless tops are a strict "no."
- **Bottoms:** Full-length trousers or long skirts. Shorts, capris, and short skirts are prohibited in sacred sites.
- **Footwear:** You must remove your shoes before entering any temple. Wear slip-on shoes to save time, and always pack extra thick socks because the stone floors are freezing in the winter months.
- **Headwear:** Hats and sunglasses must be removed before entering a temple precinct.

Good to know

- Pack at least 2 temple-appropriate outfits for daily dzong visits
- Carry a lightweight scarf or shawl as a backup cover-up
- Slip-on shoes save time at temple entrances

Layering for the Himalayan Climate

The golden rule for Bhutan is **layers**. You can experience four seasons in a single day as you drive from a chilly mountain pass down into a subtropical valley like Punakha.

LayerRecommended ItemsBase LayerMoisture-wicking T-shirts (non-cotton) and thermal tops for winter/autumn.Mid-LayerA warm fleece or a light wool sweater.Outer LayerA windproof/waterproof shell jacket. A down jacket is essential for nights and high-altitude spots like Phobjikha.BottomsQuick-dry hiking pants are better than jeans, which become heavy and cold when wet.

The Adventure & Hiking Kit

If you are tackling the Tiger's Nest (Taktshang) or any of the high-altitude treks, these are non-negotiable:

- **Broken-in Hiking Boots:** Do not bring brand-new boots; the steep descents will cause blisters.
- **Trekking Poles:** Highly recommended to protect your knees during the 700+ steps down from Taktshang.
- **Daypack (20–30L):** With a rain cover to keep your camera and layers dry.
- **High SPF Sunscreen & Lip Balm:** The Himalayan sun is much stronger than it feels due to the thin air.

Important

Never bring brand-new hiking boots to Bhutan. Break them in for at least 2-3 weeks before your trip to avoid painful blisters on the steep trails.

Electronics & Essential Gear

- **Universal Adapter:** Bhutan primarily uses Types C, D, and G plugs. A universal adapter is your best bet.
- **Power Bank:** Cold weather drains phone and camera batteries 30% faster than usual.
- **Flashlight/Headlamp:** Frequent power cuts can happen in rural areas, and many temple interiors are dimly lit.
- **Reusable Water Bottle:** Bhutan is environmentally conscious and discourages single-use plastics. Most hotels provide filtered water for refills.

Good to know

- Bring extra camera batteries - cold weather drains them quickly
- Download offline maps before arriving
- A headlamp is invaluable for early morning monastery visits

The "Bhutan Health" Kit

- **Motion Sickness Meds:** The roads in Bhutan are notoriously winding. If you are prone to carsickness, these are essential for the long drives between valleys.
- **Altitude Sickness Pills (Diamox):** Consult your doctor before travel, as most of your trip will be spent above 2,300m.
- **Hydration Salts:** Dehydration happens fast at high altitudes.
- **Antacids:** Bhutanese food is famous for its heat (Ema Datshi is mostly chilies!). Your stomach may need help adjusting.

Health Advisory

Consult your doctor about Diamox (acetazolamide) before your trip. Most destinations in Bhutan are above 2,300m, and some passes exceed 3,800m.

Complete Packing Checklist

Clothing

- ☐ 2-3 long-sleeved shirts/blouses
- ☐ 2-3 full-length pants/trousers
- ☐ 1 warm fleece or sweater
- ☐ 1 down jacket or heavy outer layer
- ☐ 1 waterproof/windproof shell
- ☐ Thermal base layers (winter)
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes
- ☐ Broken-in hiking boots
- ☐ Slip-on shoes for temples
- ☐ Warm socks (5+ pairs)
- ☐ Warm hat and gloves (winter)
- ☐ Sunglasses

Gear & Electronics

- ☐ Daypack with rain cover
- ☐ Trekking poles (for Tiger's Nest)
- ☐ Universal power adapter
- ☐ Power bank
- ☐ Camera with extra batteries
- ☐ Headlamp/flashlight
- ☐ Reusable water bottle

Health & Toiletries

- ☐ Sunscreen (SPF 50+)
- ☐ Lip balm with SPF
- ☐ Motion sickness medication
- ☐ Altitude sickness pills

- ☐ Hydration salts
- ☐ Antacids
- ☐ Personal medications
- ☐ Hand sanitizer

Pro Tips

Carry New USD Bills

If you plan to use US Dollars for tips or shopping, ensure the bills are printed after 2006 and are crisp with no tears or markings. Banks in Bhutan are extremely picky and will often reject "worn" foreign currency.

- **Pack light:** Most hotels offer laundry service, and you'll be moving between hotels frequently.
- **Leave room for souvenirs:** Bhutan has beautiful textiles, handicrafts, and artwork you'll want to bring home.
- **Bring snacks:** Long drives between valleys mean limited food options. Pack energy bars and trail mix.
- **Dress in layers:** You can experience four seasons in one day.

What NOT to Pack

Save space and avoid issues at customs by leaving these items at home:

- **Drones:** Strictly prohibited for tourists. They will be confiscated at Paro Airport without a government permit (rarely granted).
- **Excessive Luggage:** You'll change hotels frequently. A single medium suitcase plus a daypack is ideal.
- **Formal Attire:** Unless attending a specific event, you won't need suits or dresses. Smart casual is the norm.
- **Heavy Reading Material:** Download e-books instead. You'll want that luggage space for souvenirs.
- **Tobacco Products (in excess):** Bhutan has strict anti-tobacco laws. You can bring limited personal quantities but must declare them and pay duty.
- **Single-Use Plastics:** Bhutan is environmentally conscious. Bring reusable bags and bottles instead.

Luggage & Weight Limits

Flying into Bhutan has strict baggage requirements:

- **Checked Baggage:** Drukair and Bhutan Airlines allow 20kg for economy class, 30kg for business class.
- **Carry-On:** 5kg limit with dimensions not exceeding 55x35x25cm.
- **Excess Baggage:** Charged at approximately $5-8 USD per kg. Fees are steep, so pack wisely.
- **Bag Type:** Soft-sided luggage is recommended. You'll be loading bags in and out of vehicles daily, and hard cases are cumbersome on unpaved roads.
- **Daypack:** Essential for daily excursions. Keep it under 30L with rain cover.

Tip: Leave 3-5kg of luggage space free for souvenirs. Bhutanese textiles and handicrafts are worth bringing home.

Season-Specific Additions

Add these items based on when you're traveling:

- **Spring (Mar-May):**
  - Light rain jacket
  - Allergy medication (pollen from rhododendrons)
  - Layers for variable temperatures
  - Sunscreen
- **Summer/Monsoon (Jun-Aug):**
  - Waterproof jacket (essential)
  - Umbrella
  - Quick-dry clothing
  - Insect repellent
  - Waterproof bag for electronics
  - Extra socks
- **Autumn (Sep-Nov):**
  - Medium-weight layers
  - Light fleece

- Sun protection
- Comfortable trekking gear (best trekking season)

- **Winter (Dec-Feb):**
  - Heavy down jacket
  - Thermal underwear
  - Warm hat and gloves
  - Hand/toe warmers
  - Thick wool socks
  - Moisturizer (dry air)

Documents Checklist

Keep these documents organized and accessible:

- **Passport:** Valid for at least 6 months from arrival date. Keep a photocopy separate from the original.
- **Visa Clearance Letter:** Print multiple copies. You'll show this at check-in and upon arrival at Paro.
- **Travel Insurance:** Print your policy details and emergency contact numbers. Ensure it covers high-altitude trekking if applicable.
- **Flight Tickets:** Print or save offline copies of your e-tickets.
- **Hotel Confirmations:** Useful for reference, though your guide handles logistics.
- **Emergency Contacts:** Your tour operator's 24/7 number, embassy contacts, and personal emergency contacts.
- **Vaccination Records:** If required for your transit countries.

Pro Tip: Store digital copies of all documents in your email and a cloud service. If anything gets lost, you can access copies from any device.

What's Available Locally

Don't overpack—these items are easily found in Thimphu and Paro:

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- **Basic Toiletries:** Shampoo, soap, toothpaste, and deodorant are available at pharmacies and general stores.
- **Snacks:** Biscuits, chips, chocolate, and instant noodles are sold everywhere.
- **Basic Medications:** Paracetamol, cold medicine, and digestive aids are available at pharmacies.
- **Bottled Water:** Widely available, though we recommend a reusable bottle.
- **SIM Cards:** TashiCell and B-Mobile SIMs available at Paro Airport arrivals.
- **Warm Clothing:** Basic sweaters and jackets can be purchased, though quality trekking gear is limited.

Note: Selection is limited outside Thimphu. If you need specialty items (specific medications, dietary foods, high-end gear), bring them from home.

Gifts for Your Guide & Driver

While not required, small gifts from your home country are deeply appreciated:

- **For Guides:** Quality pens, branded T-shirts, regional souvenirs from your country, books about your home region, small electronics (earbuds, phone accessories).
- **For Drivers:** Sunglasses, baseball caps, snacks from your country, car accessories.
- **For Children (at schools/villages):** School supplies like notebooks, colored pencils, and erasers are always welcome. Avoid sweets.
- **For Monasteries:** If you wish to make an offering, incense, butter lamps, or small cash donations are appropriate.

Cultural Note: Gifts are given with both hands as a sign of respect. Your guide will be genuinely touched by thoughtful gifts, especially items that share something about your culture.

Need More Information?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts for personalized advice.

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