

# BHUTAN

## Location

South Asia (between Assam in northeast India and China).

## Area

47,000 per sq km (18,146 sq miles).

## Population

682,321 (2005).

## Population Density

14.5 per sq km.

## Capital

Thimphu.

Population: 100,000 (estimate, Greater Thimphu).

## Government

Constitutional Monarchy.

## Language

Dzongkha is the official language. A large number of dialects are spoken, owing to the physical isolation of many villages. Sharchop Kha is spoken in eastern Bhutan. Nepali is common in the south of the country. English has been the language of education since 1964 but there is growing emphasis on learning Dzongkha to strengthen national identity.

## Religion

The Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism (*Drukpa Kagyu*) is the state religion; the majority of Bhutanese people follow the Drukpa school of the Kagyupa sect. Those living in the south are mainly Hindu.

## Time

GMT + 6.

## Electricity

230 volts AC, 50Hz.

## Head of Government

Prime Minister Jigme Thinley since April 2008 (third non-consecutive term of office).

## Head of State

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck since 2006.

## Telephone

Country code: 975. The telephone service is reasonable though getting a line can be slow at times.

## Mobile Telephone

Coverage is extensive but since the mobile network is now superseding the landline service, oversubscription can lead to problems.

## Internet

Access is growing. There are Internet cafes in large towns and access in major hotels across the country.

## Media

Fears of outside influences undermining the country's monarchy, freedom and culture meant that for years Bhutan had a deliberate policy of isolation, including a ban on television. The state-run *Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS)* launched the first TV service as part of celebrations surrounding King Jigme Singye Wangchuk's silver jubilee in 1999. Radio broadcasting began in 1973 and the first

Internet service was introduced in 1999. There are no private broadcasters, but cable television is thriving though 'undesirable and irrelevant channels' have been filtered out.

### **Post**

Mail from Bhutan is liable to disruption because of the high value of Bhutanese stamps; they may be steamed off the envelopes en route.

**Post Office hours:** Mon-Fri 0900-1700, Sat 0900-1200 (summer); Mon-Fri 0900-1600, Sat 0900-1200 (winter).

### **Press**

• *Kuensel* is the autonomous weekly. *The Bhutan Times* and *Bhutan Observer* are privately-owned.

### **Radio**

• *Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS)* is the state-run radio station.

### **Note**

2011 dates to be confirmed.

The traditional Buddhist holidays are observed, including Day of Offerings, Losar (New Year), Shabdung Kuchoey, Lord Buddha's Parinirvana, Birthday of Guru Rinpoche, First Sermon of Lord Buddha, Thimphu Tsechu and Thimphu Tsechu Dromchoe and the Descending Days of Lord Buddha. Also to be noted are the Winter Solstice, Blessed Rainy Day, the Meeting of Nine Evils, Dashain, the National Day and royal anniversaries. The Buddhist festivals are declared according to local astronomical observations and it is not possible to forecast the date of their occurrence. Please contact local authorities for the latest dates. Dates of smaller festivals are liable to change at short notice.

Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2011-December 2011 period.

**2 Jan** *Winter Solstice.*

**14 Feb**

**15 Feb** *Losar.*

**20 Feb** *Traditional Day of Offering.*

**21 Feb** *Birth Anniversary of Fifth Druk Gyalpo.*

**23 Apr** *Zhabdrung Kuchoe.*

**2 May** *Birth Anniversary of Third Druk Gyalpo.*

**27 May** *Lord Buddha's Parinivana.*

**2 Jun** *Coronation Day of Fourth Druk Gyalpo.*

**21 Jun** *Birth Anniversary of Guru Rinpoche.*

**15 Jul** *First Sermon of Lord Buddha.*

**13 Sep** *Thimphu Drubchen.*

**17 Sep**

**19 Sep** *Thimphu Tshechu.*

**17 Oct** *Dashain.*

**1 Nov** *The coronation of Druk Gyalpo.*

**11 Nov**

**13 Nov** *Birth Anniversary of Fourth Druk Gyalpo.*

**17 Dec** *National Day.*