

May 21st Orientation meeting Summary
Managed by Drs. Renata Ticha and Iris Drower

Overview of Bhutan and Royal Thimphu College (RTC)

Royal Thimphu College is a private college in Thimphu, Bhutan under the Royal University of Bhutan. It is Bhutan's first private college. The campus culture at Royal Thimphu College seamlessly balances academic rigor with traditional Bhutanese values and global diversity. The institution fosters a unique, close-knit learning environment centered around community vitality and holistic personal development.

Culture in Bhutan

Bhutanese culture is deeply intertwined with Vajrayana Buddhism, forming a way of life that prioritizes spiritual well-being, community cohesion, and environmental preservation over pure commercial growth. This philosophy is structurally anchored in the country's famous Gross National Happiness (GNH) development framework, which legally mandates cultural preservation as one of its four foundational pillars.

Altitude and Altitude Sickness

Bhutan has the distinction of being the world's most mountainous nation, featuring an average elevation of 10,760 feet (3,280 meters) above sea level.

Strategic Acclimatization for Bhutan

Bhutan's unique entry point makes managing your transition straightforward:

1. **The Arrival Rule:** You will land at Paro International Airport, located at 2,280 meters (7,480 feet). Avoid strenuous physical activity, long walks, or heavy hikes on Day 1 and Day 2.
2. **Medical Preparation:** Pack prescription [Acetazolamide \(Diamox\)](#) before arriving, as local trekking crews and remote villages rarely carry Western pharmaceuticals.
3. **Pre-existing Medical Conditions:** If you have heart or lung disease, cardiac issues, diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, pregnancy, or high blood pressure, please consult a physician before traveling to a high altitude. Regarding any prescription drugs that may be impacted by altitude sickness, please consult a physician.
4. **Hydrate Continuously:** The mountain air is exceptionally dry, and your breathing rate will increase. Drink water daily. Local hot butter tea (*Suja*) and herbal teas are excellent alternatives.
5. **Eat Carbohydrates:** Choose local red rice, potatoes, and momos (dumplings). Carbohydrates are the preferred fuel source at high altitudes because they require less oxygen for your body to metabolize than proteins or fats.
6. **Avoid Alcohol:** Traditional Bhutanese rice wine (*Ara*) and local beers should be avoided for the first 48 hours, as alcohol suppresses your breathing depth overnight.
7. **Oxygen Supply.** Participants who would like to bring oxygen packages may do so, especially if they have breathing issues. As the hike reaches approximately 3,000 meters above sea level, some participants may feel the effects of the altitude. We would advise those with health issues not to take risks.

Currency

The official currency of Bhutan is the Bhutanese Ngultrum (Nu / BTN). However, because the country maintains close financial ties with India, the Indian Rupee (INR) is also accepted as legal tender and is used interchangeably nationwide. The two currencies are pegged at a **strict 1:1** exchange ratio.

Currencies Officially Eligible for Exchange

The Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan authorizes local banks to exchange a specific list of international currencies. If you hold cash in any of these currencies, you can convert them upon arrival:

- **Euro (EUR)**
- **British Pound (GBP)**
- **Australian Dollar (AUD)**
- **Singapore Dollar (SGD)**
- **Japanese Yen (JPY)**
- **Canadian Dollar (CAD)**

You can use the ATMs at the airport, the university, or near your hotel, or you can go to the bank exchange at the airport to acquire some cash. It's wise to bring cash because most shops don't take credit cards. They take US dollars, euros, and Indian rupees. Keep enough US dollars on hand to pay for the planned outings, your hotel, but at marketplaces, use Bhutanese or Indian rupees.

Adapters

The standard voltage in Bhutan (230 V) is much higher than the voltage level your devices typically operate at in the United States (120 V). Without a converter, you risk serious damage to your devices. Additionally, be aware that the frequency in Bhutan differs.

Packing Recommendations for Travelers

1. **Bring a Universal Travel Adapter:** Due to the mixed outlet styles, buying a global multi-plug adapter from retailers like Amazon that covers Types C, D, and G is the safest strategy.
2. **Check for Dual-Voltage Compliance:** If you are traveling from North America (which uses 120V), verify the physical label on your electronics. Cell phones, laptops, and cameras are almost always **dual-voltage (Input: 100–240V, 50/60 Hz)** and only require a simple plastic shape adapter.
3. **Avoid High-Wattage Single-Voltage Devices:** Do not bring American 120V hair dryers, straighteners, or electric shavers without a heavy-duty industrial voltage converter. Plotted directly into Bhutan's 230V grid, these devices will instantly short-circuit or overheat.

The Three Plug Types Found in Bhutan

- **Type D (Most Common):** Features **three round pins** arranged in a large triangle. This is the standard Indian plug type and is found extensively across Bhutan.
- **Type C:** Features **two round parallel pins**. This is the standard European style and is common for low-wattage devices like phone chargers.
- **Type G:** Features **three flat rectangular pins** in a triangle. This is the standard United Kingdom style and is increasingly found in newer luxury hotels

Cell phone and Internet Connectivity

While internet will work at your hotel and the University please check with your cell phone plan provider to see if it works in Bhutan.

Hotels

[Five hotels](#), all of which have been evaluated for their cost and accessibility to the university transportation pick-up and drop-off, will provide housing this year.

Delegates are required to inform staff of their preferred dates and accommodations by email or phone (using a list provided).

- There are fees per room, not per person.
- Cash is the only form of payment accepted. In Bhutan, the majority of businesses don't take credit cards.
- Bhutanese Ngultrum, Indian Rupees, US dollars, and euros are among the available payment methods.
- On weekdays, banks are open from 9 to 5 p.m. ATMs are open around-the-clock.
- There are ATMs and money exchange services both in town and at the arrival port.
- Money exchange will also be available at the University as well.
- You will be picked up daily to and from the hotels listed on our website as well as for cultural events and guest events.

Travel logistics

- Transportation to/from the airport is included in your registration fees. The pickups begin on June 19th, The drop offs end on June 28th. Please fill out this form by May 28. [Travel form](#).

Cultural Day June 24th

- Please fill out this form by May 28 so we can determine which [tour you](#) will be going on.

Flights

Flights from other parts of the world you will need to check the frequency and scheduling. Many only leave twice a week. You can check both Druk Air and or Bhutanese Airlines for schedules.

Remember if you are traveling through India and staying overnight you will need to apply for an e-visa(<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>). Please check the specifications coming from other countries as well.

If you have issues with the local flight segment please contact: Pema at: pemalhazom@rtc.bt

Live and Silent Auction

International donations from our delegates are gathered and put up for auction at our silent and live auction every two years. The Marg Csapo Scholarship Fund gains from these two occasions. People from developing nations can join our Biennial Conferences in part because to the proceeds from these auctions. Please don't forget to pack any items you would like to give for these auction events in order to ensure the auction's success. These will be gathered at the conference's registration desk. International researchers from all around the world will be supported by funds until 2026! Three scholars from Malawi, Vietnam, and Cameroon are receiving our support this year. To learn more about these outstanding recipients, read the article in this issue.

Gala Event:

On the last Day June 26th you will have an opportunity to meet and greet delegates from around the world. Here is a great time to share your culture by dressing in your native attire, bid on our live auction, dance, and share your unique experiences.

Bhutanese Scholarships

Thanks to the generosity of our members and Bhutanese contacts we were able to raise \$4650 USD to provide 30 Bhutanese teachers an opportunity to attend this conference.

Conference Proceedings

We are still looking for delegates to be reviewers for our conference proceedings. If you are interested please contact Dr. Renata Ticha at tich0018@umn.edu

Dress Code for Men Dress Code for Dzongs, Temples, and our Conference

When traveling to Bhutan, men must dress to accommodate two distinct requirements: deep cultural respect (especially when visiting sacred sites) and rapidly shifting mountain climates.

When entering official government fortresses (*Dzongs*), monasteries, temples, and religious festivals (*Tshechus*), and the IASE conference male travelers must wear smart-casual.

- **Pants:** Long, full-length trousers, chinos, or smart jeans are mandatory. **Shorts, three-quarter capris, and athletic sweatpants are not recommended.**
- **Shirts:** Collared shirts (polo shirts or button-downs) are highly preferred. Long-sleeved shirts are ideal. If you wear a T-shirt, it must have a high crew neck and no offensive graphics. **Sleeveless tank tops are forbidden.**
- **Layering:** A smart jacket, lightweight sweater, or blazer looks respectful and provides warmth inside unheated stone temples.
- **Footwear:** Sturdy, clean closed-toe shoes or hiking boots must be worn with **full socks**. Sandals, flip-flops, and bare feet are not permitted inside religious compounds.
- **The Shoe Removal Rule:** You will be required to take off your shoes frequently before stepping onto the wooden floors of inner temple sanctuaries. Wear slip-on shoes or boots that are easy to lace, and ensure your socks are clean and free of holes.

Daily Sightseeing and Road Travel

Outside of religious and government properties—such as during long drives between valleys or walking around downtown Thimphu and Paro—the dress code is relaxed.

- **Comfortable Trousers:** Lightweight hiking pants or durable jeans are best for navigating uneven sidewalks and unpaved pathways.
- **Layered Tops:** Because you will frequently transition between air-conditioned vehicles, windy mountain passes, and warm valley floors, use a layering system (T-shirt + flannel shirt + light fleece).

High-Altitude Trekking and Outdoor Hikes

If you are hiking up to the **Tiger's Nest Monastery** or embarking on wilderness treks, optimize for performance and changing weather conditions:

- **Moisture-Wicking Base:** Avoid cotton, which traps sweat and causes chills. Choose merino wool or synthetic athletic shirts.
- **Outer Shell:** A windproof and waterproof rain jacket
- **Headwear:** Bring a wide-brimmed sun hat for daytime UV protection and a warm beanie for cold mornings and evenings.

Cultural Do's and Don'ts for Men

- **Do Not Wear Hats Indoors:** Baseball caps, beanies, and sun hats must be removed before entering any temple room, Dzong courtyard, or when passing a royal palace.

- **Do Not Wrap Jackets Around the Waist:** Tying a sweater or jacket around your waist is viewed locally as untidy and disrespectful in public spaces. Wear it or pack it away in a daypack.
- **Can You Wear a Gho?** Foreign men are welcome to purchase and wear a traditional *Gho* for festivals or special photos. If you choose to wear one, ensure a local guide helps you tie it correctly, as an improperly folded Gho is considered disrespectful.

Woman for Dzongs, Temples, and our Conference

When entering official government fortresses (*Dzongs*), monasteries, temples, and religious festivals (*Tshechus*), and the IASE conference wardrobe should prioritize modesty, layering, and physical comfort.

- **Tops:** Shoulders, upper arms, and cleavage must be completely covered. Wear collared shirts, button-downs, or high-crewneck long-sleeve tops. **Sleeveless tank tops, spaghetti straps, and low-cut blouses are not recommended.**
- **Bottoms:** Ankle-length maxi skirts or full-length trousers (chinos, hiking pants, or loose un-ripped jeans) are required. **Shorts, capris, and short skirts are not recommended.**
- **Dress for work (smart attire)** including dresses, skirts and so on.
- **The Layering Hack:** Keep a lightweight cardigan, pashmina shawl, or jacket in your daypack. If you are wearing a standard T-shirt, you can easily throw the shawl over your shoulders before crossing a temple threshold.
- **Footwear and Socks:** You must wear clean, closed-toe walking shoes. Because you are required to take off your shoes before stepping into a temple interior or shrine room, **always wear thick, hole-free socks** to walk comfortably on cold stone or wood floors.

Daily Sightseeing and Valley Transit

Outside of religious structures—such as shopping in downtown Thimphu, dining, or driving between towns—the dress code is relaxed but remains culturally conservative.

- Avoid gym clothing like skin-tight athletic leggings or cropped workout tops, as these are viewed locally as overly casual or underwear-like.
- Opt for loose, lightweight, and breathable linen or cotton utility trousers and casual tunics.

Wellness Free time Opportunities

We can find comfort, inner serenity, and a stronger bond with ourselves through a spiritual journey. This quest takes on an entirely new dimension in the exquisite world of Bhutan, a country known for its spiritual legacy. As a result, we are offering a few locations where you can do these things independently in your free time. Reach out to these groups and schedule an unforgettable relaxing experience!

Yoga Yangchen – Wellness in Thimphu

Yoga Yangchen, led by Yangchen Lhamo, offers personalised yoga and meditation classes in Thimphu, Bhutan. Her approach integrates Hatha and Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga with meditation techniques like Trataka and Yoga Nidra, aiming to enhance physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Classes are available at her studio in Babesa, Thimphu, or at your preferred location. She also provides wellness retreats and corporate wellness programs. As a certified yoga instructor and sound healer, Yangchen is dedicated to promoting holistic health and mindfulness.

Phone: +975 17992020

Website: yogayangchen.com

Instagram: [@yogayangchenbhutan](https://www.instagram.com/yogayangchenbhutan)

Facebook: [Yoga Yangchen](https://www.facebook.com/YogaYangchen)

*** Participants need to call and do an individual booking and check timings.

DSP Spa & Salon – Wellness in Thimphu/ Norbu healing

DSP Spa & Salon, located in Choego, Chubachu, Thimphu, is a community-focused wellness centre run by trained De-suups under the De-suung Skilling Programme. The spa offers a range of services, including massages, facials, manicures, pedicures, and eyelash extensions, all designed to relax and rejuvenate. Visitors can enjoy professional treatments while supporting a vocational training initiative that empowers the local community.

Contact Details:

Phone: +975 17441874

Instagram: @dspspasalon

Hours: 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM, Closed on Monday

Norbu Healing

At Norbu Healing, we are dedicated to guiding you on a journey of renewal, balance, and inner harmony. Located in the serene area of Changjalu, Olakha, Thimphu, our center combines ancient healing traditions with modern wellness practices to promote physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being for locals and visitors alike.

Website: <https://www.norbuhealing.com/>

Dhungsel Home SPA

The home spa is independently operated by a group of enthusiastic visually impaired (blind) youth certified by Amankora Resort. The spa's mission run by Tshering is to empower other people living with disabilities through employment and massage.

About the spa: <https://www.bhutanfound.org/dhungsel-home-spa-in-thimphu-empowering-persons-with-disabilities/>

Mobile: +975 17651269

Email: dhungselhomespa@gmail.com

Questions answered from our discussion:

1. Will all presentation rooms be set up with a computer and a projector?
2. Should presenters bring their presentations on a jump drive or should we store all presentations in one location (e.g., Google drive)?
3. When will the guest program be finalized and we can send it out to them?
4. Is there an accessibility map/document about Thimphu and the college?
5. Is there a regulation on what souvenirs can be taken out of the country?
6. Two participants asked whether they can purchase oxygen tanks in case they need them in the high altitude?

Answers:

1. Yes, the computers and screens will already be set up in each breakout session room.
2. For presentations, participants can bring their presentation on a drive, as this may be more convenient than uploading files to the shared Google Drive. The presenters can contact @Ugyen Wangchuk (Development & Ext. Relations) [Staff RTC] to share their presentations.
3. Regarding the Thimphu map and RTC information, we will include these in the information booklet as part of the conference package.
4. Regarding the guest programme, Pema has updated the programme and shared it with you. The only change is the date for the Tiger's Nest visit; the rest of the programme remains the same. [Click here](#)
5. Regarding souvenirs, only antique items are restricted. The buyer can request the shopkeeper to issue a clearance letter that can be obtained through an online application.
6. Participants who would like to bring oxygen packages may do so, especially if they have breathing issues. As the hike reaches approximately 3,000 meters above sea level, some participants may feel the effects of the altitude. We would advise those with health issues not to take risks.

Additional fun places to visit during your free time:

Garden of Chang Yul in Thimphu

Key highlights of the park's landscaping and design include:

- **Rose Garden & Flora:** The park boasts Thimphu's largest rose garden and an arboretum designed to showcase native plant species.
- **Sensory Gardens:** Part of the park's design includes ethnobotanical sensory gardens.
- **The Meadows & Landscaping:** Expansive, open lawn areas (The Meadows) designed for leisure, featuring riverside views and picnic spots.
- **Key Amenities:** The area includes an elevated jogging bridge, a playground, a floating bar on a deck, and a café for visitors.

The park was developed through a royal initiative, involving over 600 volunteers from the De-suung Skilling Program, transforming a former parking lot into a sustainable, vibrant green space

[Simply Bhutan](#)

[4.4\(1.3K\) · Heritage museum](#)

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National Textile Museum in Thimphu

<https://thimphu.gov.bt/national-textile-museum/>