Hotels in Bhutan: Complete Accommodation Guide

Accommodation 14 min read

> Accommodation in Bhutan is far more than just a place to sleep; it is an integral part of the "High Value, Low Volume" tourism philosophy. Whether you are looking for a traditional farmhouse stay or a high-end mountain retreat, the kingdom offers a diverse range of options. This guide outlines the categories, booking regulations, and top recommendations for your stay in Bhutan.

Understanding the Booking System

Before booking, it is important to understand how the system works in Bhutan.

- **The Sustainable Development Fee (SDF):** All international tourists pay a daily SDF of **US$100 per adult** (children 6–11 pay half, under-6s are free); Indian nationals pay a reduced rate of Nu. 1,200 per night.
- **Approved Accommodation Only:** tourists may only stay in hotels, homestays, farmstays, or campsites **approved by the Department of Tourism** — the approved list spans everything from five-star lodges to certified village homestays. You can search the official list of certified hotels at services.bhutan.travel.
- **Luxury Pricing:** 4-star and 5-star properties set their own premium room rates; the SDF stays the same whichever standard you choose.
- **Byways tour prices:** our packages include certified **3-star accommodation as standard** — upgrading to 4-star, 5-star, or luxury lodges is available at an added cost. Ask us for upgrade pricing when planning your trip.

What types of hotels are available in Bhutan?
From ultra-luxury (Amankora, Six Senses, Como) to 3-4 star tourist hotels, budget guesthouses, and traditional farmstays. Most tour packages include 3-4 star hotels. Since 2022, you can choose your own accommodation.

Luxury Lodges & Resorts (5-Star)

Bhutan is home to some of the world's most exclusive mountain retreats. These are often designed as "circuits," allowing you to stay in the same brand's lodges across different valleys (Thimphu, Paro, Punakha, Gangtey, and Bumthang). Are there luxury hotels in Bhutan?
Absolutely. Amankora (5 lodges across Bhutan), Six Senses (Thimphu, Paro, Punakha), Como Uma Paro/Punakha, and Taj Tashi Thimphu offer world-class luxury. Expect $800-2,000+ per night plus SDF.

Boutique & 4-Star Hotels

These provide a blend of modern amenities and Bhutanese architecture, often offering better value for travelers who want comfort without the Aman-level price tag.

Standard 3-Star Hotels

These are the most common accommodations. They are clean, comfortable, and always decorated in traditional Bhutanese style.

Homestays & Farmhouses

For those seeking an authentic experience, the Department of Tourism has certified several farmhouses across the country. Expect pitched roofs, wood-burning stoves (*bukharis*), and home-cooked meals like Ema Datshi. Most farmhouses offer a **Hot Stone Bath**, where river stones are heated in a fire and dropped into a wooden tub filled with medicinal herbs. Should I stay in farmstays?
Highly recommended for authentic experience! Farmstays offer home-cooked meals, family interaction, traditional architecture, and hot stone baths. Best in Phobjikha and Bumthang valleys. Book through your operator.

Do

- Experience traditional Bhutanese family life firsthand
- Enjoy home-cooked meals with local ingredients
- Try the traditional Hot Stone Bath ritual
- Learn about rural Bhutanese customs and traditions

Don't

- Expect hotel-style amenities
- Forget to bring warm layers for cold nights
- Miss the opportunity to help with farm activities
- Leave without trying the local ara (rice wine)

Regional Highlights: Where to Stay

Different regions offer unique accommodation experiences based on their geography and attractions. Is accommodation better in western or eastern Bhutan?
Western Bhutan (Paro, Thimphu, Punakha) has far more hotels including luxury options. Eastern Bhutan has basic guesthouses and homestays - comfortable but simpler. This is part of the eastern adventure.

Essential Amenities to Look For

When browsing hotels, check for these specific Bhutanese features that enhance your experience.

- **Bukharis:** Traditional wood-burning stoves (essential in winter).
- **Hot Stone Baths:** A must-try Bhutanese wellness ritual.
- **Tea Rooms:** Most hotels have a dedicated space for Suja (butter tea).
- **WiFi:** While common in Thimphu/Paro, it can be spotty in remote valleys like Bumthang or Haa.

What amenities are standard in Bhutanese hotels?
Tourist-class hotels include WiFi (often slow), hot water, heating (essential at altitude), restaurant, and laundry service. Hot stone baths are a unique Bhutanese amenity. Some hotels lack elevators.

Fun fact: that hotel WiFi is younger than you might think — Bhutan was the last country in the world to switch on television, and both TV and the internet only arrived in 1999, by royal decree. Barely a generation

later, you can video-call home from a farmhouse.

Booking Tips

Smart planning will help you secure the best accommodations for your Bhutan trip. Can I choose my own hotel?

Yes! The new SDF system allows you to book accommodation independently. Work with your tour operator to select hotels matching your budget and preferences. Book early during peak seasons.

Pro Tips

- **Peak Season (Sept–Nov & March–May):** Book at least **4–6 months in advance**, as the best boutique and luxury lodges fill up quickly for festival dates.
- **Visa/SDF Support:** Most 4-star and 5-star hotels can assist you with your visa and SDF payment processing if you are traveling independently.
- **Location vs. View:** In Paro, decide if you want to be near the town for walking or further out for a quiet view of the mountains.

Frequently Asked Questions

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Need More Information?

Contact our Bhutan travel experts for personalized advice.

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