

### **Sustainability Guidelines: Bhutan**

You are about to embark on a journey to the mountainous country of Bhutan. Despite its size, Bhutan is one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world. From jungles in the south to the Himalayas disappearing into the clouds in the north, this diverse topography provides for millions of different species. The majority of the country remains intact and pristine; old growth forests still cover 70% of the land.

#### **Environmental Issues:**

Bhutan's natural beauty is, however, threatened by environmental challenges. The main environmental struggles that Bhutan faces are:

- Soil erosion occurs because fifty percent of the land in Bhutan is situated on mountainous slopes subject to landslides during the monsoon season. Other contributing factors are the over-cutting of timber, road construction, and construction of irrigation channels.
- Deforestation due to over logging of forests and unsustainable agriculture practices.
- Limited access to potable water; only 86% of all city residents and 60% of rural peoples have access to pure drinking water.

#### **Environmental Initiatives:**

The people and government of Bhutan realize the importance of preserving their country and are already at an advantage due to the rural nature of the Bhutanese people. Bhutanese have a strong land ethic; their livelihoods are tied to the land. Because of this strong connection, they respect the natural resources more than many other emerging nation peoples. In addition to sectioning off acres of protected forests and biodiversity preserves, the country has also outlawed plastic bags.

*Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB)* has launched an aggressive environmental campaign in Bhutanese schools, on television and on the radio. In addition to environmental education for the people of Bhutan, the government has also made a national commitment to future generations by charting a path of development called the *Middle Path*. This development upholds environmental and cultural preservation as an integral part of developing Bhutan. Development will incorporate cultural and spiritual enhancement of the people and preservation of the lands of Bhutan.

RGoB also designed *The Commitment to Preservation of Biodiversity* document which outlines action steps on how the natural species of Bhutan will be preserved. This declaration mandates:

- A trust fund for environmental conservation
- Formulated adequate laws to protect wildlife, biodiversity, and the people
- Set aside twenty six of the kingdoms (Bhutan) as protected area. There are nine national parks and wildlife sanctuaries that harbor the rarest and most significant animals in the world such as: rhinoceros, tiger, the snow leopard, blue sheep, and the golden langur.
- Controlled farming and agricultural activities in areas close to forest and wildlife sanctuaries.

The Nabji Trail, which you will visit, supports Bhutan's efforts to conserve nature by creating more awareness on natural and environmental issues, through tourism awareness programs and by introducing socio-economic benefits out of tourism. Specific measures are put in place to maximize socio-economic benefits and minimize negative impacts from tourism development to support the livelihood of the local community in the area and to create more awareness on natural, environmental, and cultural issues.

The trail itself has long been in use by the villagers themselves, who use the trail to commute between villages. A waste management system has been put in place wherein tour groups have to carry their non-degradable waste out of the park. Waste can be disposed of at the end of the trail, at the Park Range Office in Tongtongfey, where an incinerator is build. This incinerator is not only for the benefit of tour groups but also for the local community.

Plastic bags were banned in Bhutan in June 2005 to reduce litter that was clogging sewage systems and waterways. This movement has led many other countries to follow suit including New Delhi, Bangladesh, and Taiwan.

As a traveler to this unique nation you can help keep Bhutan pristine. Be sure to limit your water use, as the country is struggling to distribute potable water to every citizen. Do not use plastic bags or bring them into the country; they are banned for environmental purposes. Respect the national parks that you visit including the wildlife and vegetation present in the parks. And fortunately, as a traveler with Elevate Destinations, the eco-lodges that you stay in are helping preserve Bhutan for future generations.

### **Guide to Eco-Lodges in Bhutan**

**Uma Resort** is located in Paro on top of a hill over looking a 33 acre pine forest. Uma is ecologically aware, respecting the land upon which it is built. The hotel reflects local aesthetics, combining indigenous detailing with a serene modernity, keeping the number of rooms deliberately limited. In cuisine, Uma incorporates local organic foodstuffs with sophisticated Asian-led traditions. Uma also acknowledges the greater wisdom of ancient cultures and the powerful salve of unspoilt spiritualism.