

(Top right) Bhutan's rugged geography in the eastern range of the Himalayas has contributed to its relative isolation and has helped retain ancient religious and other cultural traditions. Photo copyright Michael Tobias

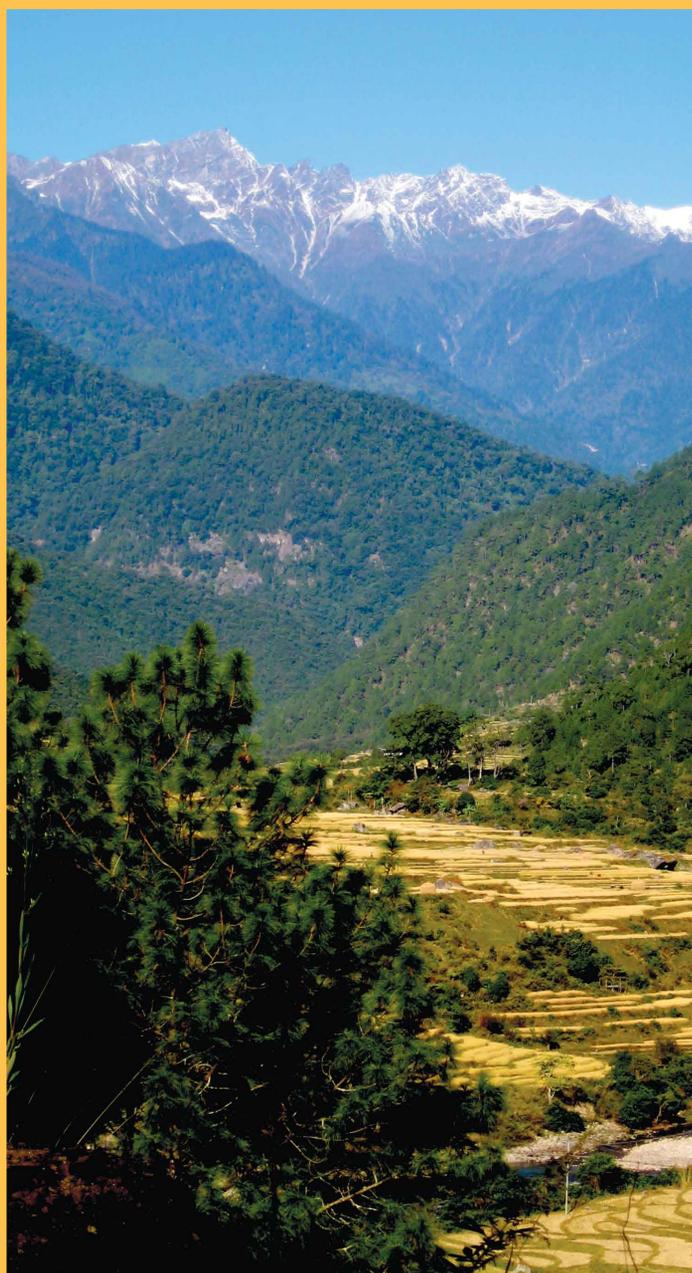
(Bottom right) Bhutan's many valleys are unique in landscape, environment, and culture. The rapidly growing capital of Thimphu is in western Bhutan.

Photo by Jonathan Coddington

(Left) Most Bhutanese continue to live in the rural areas and small villages that define Bhutan's predominantly agrarian way of life. Photo by Sean Riley



Bhutan: Land Of the Thunder Dragon



Kuzuzangpo! (Greetings!)

Known as the Land of the Thunder Dragon (Druk Yul), Bhutan is an Eastern Himalayan country about the size of West Virginia. Although Bhutan is one of the world's smallest countries bordered by two of the world's largest (China and India), it has remained independent since Buddhism came to the region more than a thousand years ago. Bhutan is home to some of the Earth's most pristine environments and diverse natural landscapes.

The country remained relatively isolated for most of its history. Its people inhabited small, remote valleys in mountainous regions. Only footpaths connected villages. Such dramatic geography and limited access to settlements helped protect the country's people from invasion and colonization, aiding the preservation of Bhutanese culture. The temperate climate and abundant rainfall have enabled the Bhutanese to develop a sustainable agrarian society.

Bhutan's participation in the 2008 Folklife Festival marks the largest and most comprehensive living exhibition of Bhutanese life and culture ever presented outside the country. It also comes at a time when Bhutan is preparing for governance under a new democratic constitution and is celebrating 100 years of monarchy with the coronation of the Fifth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

At the heart of the exhibit are an authentic Bhutanese *lhakhang* (temple) and other ritual structures. Nearby, monks present ritual arts and perform traditional masked dances, while artisans demonstrate the thirteen traditional arts and skilled archers show off Bhutan's national sport. Hundreds of people from Bhutan, the United States, and other nations cooperated to produce the program—the first of its kind in Washington, D.C.

Tashi Delek! (Good wishes!)



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