



# 2025 UPDATE







Cover Image: Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*)  
Left Image: Drumstick Primrose Flower (*Primula denticulata*)



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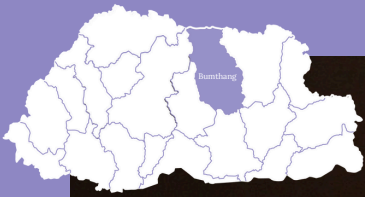
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Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen, along with Gyalsey Jigme Namgyel and Gyalsey Ugyen Wangchuck, engaging with the interactive display at the Palace Museum.

## Wangduechhoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Center: Opening doors to history and culture

The 19th-century Wangduechhoeling Palace, the birthplace of Bhutan's first king, has been recognized as a **historic treasure** by the World Monuments Fund and was recently featured as one of the **World's Greatest Places of 2025** by TIME.

Nestled in the Bumthang Valley, the Wangduechhoeling Palace stands as the finest example of 19th-century Bhutanese architecture. Despite its distinction, this accolade is often overlooked when reflecting on the palace's cultural significance, historical importance, and exciting future as communicated through the 24 exhibits housed within its complex. While not all Kings have used the palace as their full-time residence, the values and culture they imbued are palpable as one walks through its doors.

On October 30, 2024, the Palace Museum was consecrated in a special ceremony attended by Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen (Queen of Bhutan), Their Majesties the Gyalyums, members of the Royal Family, and esteemed government officials. This occasion marked the culmination of years of dedication by hundreds of artisans, craftsmen, museum professionals, philanthropists, and experts who poured time and resources into recreating these spaces so they could continue to embody and narrate the story of the Thunder Dragon kingdom.







The Utse (central tower) of Wangduechoeling Palace.

Over a decade ago, under the visionary leadership of Her Majesty Queen Mother Tseyring Pem Wangchuck (Co-Chair of the Bhutan Foundation) and the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development, the dream of transforming the palace into the Wangduechoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Center took shape. Without the steadfast commitment and support from our donors and partners, the awe-inspiring results we see today would not have been possible.

This labor of love stands as a testament to the nation's history, culture, principles, and philosophy. The restoration efforts—coordinating extensive planning, integrating innovative technologies like sound and lighting, creating educational activities, and ensuring safety and accessibility—required meticulous attention to detail. Pride, joy, and gratitude only begin to describe the emotions felt by those present at the consecration ceremony, mingled with an air of eager anticipation.



Mrs. Daphne Hoch Cunningham, Mrs. Lucy Goelet, and Ms. Norbu Dema present a Phuelcha (ceremonial gift) to Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen.

Many have reached out to express their excitement about experiencing the immersive storytelling in over 24 galleries, each designed to delve into Bhutan's rich history. The integration of modern, interactive technologies marks a pioneering step in enhancing the museum experience, blending modernity with tradition and presenting Bhutan's heritage in an engaging and accessible way for future generations. Furthermore, the local community has expressed great pride and enthusiasm for this cultural treasure in Bumthang, believing it will promote both cultural and economic vitality in the region.

The Bhutan Foundation transitioned the museum's management to a newly formed board under the patronage of Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen. On February 23, 2025, the Bhutan Foundation formally welcomed Mr. Kuenga Lhendup as the founding Executive Director. **While this marks a new chapter for the museum's development and leadership, it also signals the beginning of a renewed journey with the Palace—a place destined to inspire those who come to love it as we do.**

As we embark on this next leg of our journey to establish the Wangduechoeling Palace Museum as a global center for culture and research, we invite you to support the Museum's endowment. Your generosity helps ensure the long-term sustainability of everything we've built together — preserving this extraordinary place for future generations. With your continued support, we are creating a lasting legacy that will inspire and educate for years to come.



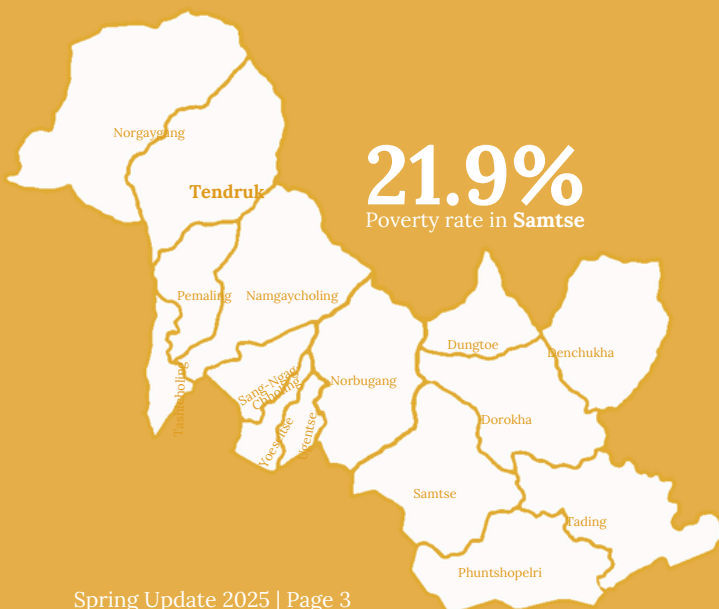
**Norbu Dema**  
Country Director





A teacher engaging with students of diverse abilities at Tendruk Central School in an inclusive classroom.

## Breaking Barriers: A School's Commitment for Children with Diverse Abilities



Every child — no matter their ability — deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their full potential. For children with disabilities in Bhutan, that opportunity is often out of reach. But with your support, we're changing that.

Through our Inclusive Education Program, we are creating accessible learning environments, training teachers, providing specialized materials, and advocating for national policies that support children with disabilities. **We've seen firsthand what happens when children are given a chance—and the transformation is extraordinary.**

At Mongar Middle Secondary School, we've already built accessible classrooms, introduced functional learning programs, and trained over 500 teachers in inclusive education strategies. The results have been nothing short of inspiring. Children who were once left behind are now thriving — learning new skills, making friends, and participating fully in school life.







Students gather for a school activity at Tendruk Central School.

With your support, our next inclusive education program will be at Tendruk Central School in Samtse —a remote community in the southern foothills of Bhutan. This school serves students from early childhood through 12th grade and reaches some of the poorest villages in the region. In Tendruk, 75 children are in urgent need of better learning spaces and specialized support.

The Tendruk community has taken remarkable steps to support these children in spite of the fact they live in one of the poorest regions in the country. From small donation drives to constructing an inclusive kitchen, volunteers, parents, teachers, and local residents have done what they can. Teachers not only educate but also advocate and create awareness, encouraging families to bring children with diverse abilities to school. They even accompany children on long 72 kilometer trips to the nearest hospital for physiotherapy, ensuring children receive the care they need.

One such inspiring story is that of Sushmita, a young girl with cerebral palsy who lives with her grandmother in a modest one-room apartment. For a long time, her grandmother didn't believe school could be a place for her. But with the encouragement of school staff and support from donors like you, everything changed. **Today, Sushmita wakes up each morning excited to go to school — stronger, healthier, and full of joy. Her smile tells the story: inclusion works, and your support makes it happen.**

With your support, we can create accessible classrooms, train dedicated teachers, and provide the tools children in Tendruk need to thrive. Our goal is to raise \$258,000 to bring quality, inclusive education to all children.

Your gift to the Bhutan Foundation's Special Education Program will directly improve lives—opening doors to learning, independence, and a brighter future.

Together, we can build a more inclusive education system in Bhutan — one where every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to succeed.



An endearing student in an inclusive classroom asks for her picture to be taken.

**7/10 children with diverse abilities never get to go to school with their peers**



**Phenki**  
Program Officer





Camera trap image of a Snow Leopard in Jigme Dorji National Park.

## Living in Harmony: Protecting Snow Leopards and Supporting Mountain Communities

Bhutan is home to over **134 Snow Leopards**, with their population increasing by **39.5%** since 2016.

Despite challenges like poaching, habitat loss, and declining prey, the Bhutan Foundation is dedicated to protecting these elusive big cats, offering them a safe haven in the northern alpine mountains.

High in the rugged mountains of Bhutan, snow leopards roam the same landscapes as the country's semi-nomadic yak herders — families who have lived in harmony with nature for generations. These herders depend on the fragile alpine ecosystem for their survival, raising yaks and gathering high-altitude medicinal plants to support their livelihoods. But this delicate balance is challenging as snow leopards sometime prey on livestock, and for herders, losing a yak means losing income.

**With your support, we're working hand-in-hand with mountain communities to improve both livelihoods and living conditions — while protecting the snow leopards they share the land with.**

One key initiative was redesigning traditional tents, which once required four yaks to carry and 60–70 wooden poles. Our new eco-friendly tents are lighter, need only two yaks, and require no wooden poles, helping preserve Bhutan's alpine forests. Through a cost-sharing program with local families, the Bhutan Foundation has delivered 232 of these tents, bringing lasting benefits to nomadic communities.







Highland children inside the durable, eco-friendly tents provided to support nomadic herding communities.

We are also improving how yak hair is harvested and processed. With over 760 specialized combs distributed and nine national technicians trained in felting, local herders are producing better-quality yak wool. This creates new opportunities for sustainable income and promotes high-value textiles from yak wool.

*“I learned how to harvest quality yak hair and teach others to process it,”* said Passang Gyem, a recent trainee. *“Now I can help herder families improve their skills and income.”*

To further strengthen conservation efforts, the Bhutan Foundation, in collaboration with the Royal Government of Bhutan, launched the **PEaCE Project — Promoting Ecological and Community Engagement for Snow Leopard Conservation**. This ambitious initiative with a budget of **\$250,000** focuses on three key areas:

- Monitor snow leopards and their prey using AI-powered camera traps
- Prevent livestock loss with predator-proof corral fencing
- Create new income streams for highland families through eco-tourism and herbal product development

By reducing conflict, enhancing livelihoods, and advancing cutting-edge wildlife research, the PEaCE project is building a future where snow leopards and mountain communities can thrive — together.

By investing in the families and forests through this program, you are improving livelihoods that have sustained communities for many generations. You are also helping protect the fragile balance between people and snow leopards, who have coexisted for centuries. No other country has reported a nationwide increase in snow leopard population as significant as Bhutan's.

Now is the time to double our effort to ensure this magnificent animal and cultural treasure co-exist peacefully in perpetuity. Donate today and be part of this enduring legacy.



**\$475** funds one durable eco-friendly tent for yak herding families



**\$3,000** funds one AI-powered camera trap



**Lungten**  
Program Officer





A female farmer participant in the Farmer-to-Farmer Extension Program demonstrates the weeding process.

## Farming Forward: Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Rural Bhutan

Agriculture employs **43.5%** of the work force and contributed nearly **15%** to **Bhutan's GDP** in 2023,

Farming is the heartbeat of Bhutan. Nearly half the population depends on agriculture to make a living, and 96% of it happens on small holder farms. It contributes significantly to the country's economy. But farmers are facing growing challenges such as small and fragmented landholdings, rural to urban migration, an aging population, and increasing threats from climate change.

The Bhutan Foundation, in partnership with Tarayana Foundation and the Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative are introducing innovative, climate-smart farming tools and training to farmers in Bhutan's most vulnerable districts.

**Our goal is to help empower smallholder farmers to grow more food, earn more income, and stay resilient in the face of climate change.**







Lead farmers from Samdrup Jongkhar being trained in climate-smart, sustainable, and organic farming practices.

We're working in seven districts across Bhutan that are highly vulnerable to food insecurity: Haa, Trongsa, Tsirang, Lhuntse, Mongar, Trashigang, and Samdrup Jongkhar. In all of these areas, the program focuses on:

- Integrating traditional indigenous farming knowledge such as reviving traditional seed banks
- Training farmers in sustainable and organic techniques including climate smart agriculture
- Teaching local farmers how to market their crops and improve communication

Recently, we trained 10 lead farmers—including four women—across five rural communities. These lead farmers have already gone on to train 150 farmers in their districts, further amplifying our efforts.

This program is key to helping Bhutan's farmers adapt to change, and build a more food-secure, thriving future for their communities. With your support, we can make it happen—together.

To expand this program and reach more communities, we need **\$50,000**. Your gift will:

- Provide hands-on training to more farmers
- Equip villages with farming tools
- Support rural youth and women in agriculture
- Build long-term food security and resilience for entire communities

Donate today and support small holder farmers in rural Bhutan.



**\$2,222** funds training on packaging, labeling, marketing and branding



**\$2,500** funds one walking tractor for a farmer



**\$4,025** funds one vermi-composting facility



**Lungten**  
Program Officer





Sherchok Women's Group members showcasing their products.

## Empowering Women and Communities: One Small Grant at a Time

Women across Bhutan are stepping up as leaders in agribusiness, representing more than **50%** of the workforce in this sector. They play a crucial role in fostering **food security**, **sustainability**, and **economic empowerment**.

Local communities in Bhutan are driving transformative change with innovative solutions to issues and problems. However, many grassroots initiatives struggle to access resources. The Bhutan Foundation's Small Grants Program (SGP) addresses this gap by empowering community-driven projects. Each year the Foundation supports **6-12 small grant initiatives** with funding ranging from **\$5,000** to **\$15,000** each.

One such initiative supported by the Bhutan Foundation's Small Grants Program is the Sherchok Women's Group's agribusiness project in Gelephu. **While their journey highlights the potential of community-driven efforts, it is only one example among many women-led initiatives transforming Bhutan's agricultural landscape.** Across the country, women are learning essential skills in food processing, business management, and digital marketing, helping them transition from traditional roles to leadership in agribusiness.







Notably, these women have produced a variety of value-added products such as honey, spicy condiments, candy, powders, and soups, that have become popular in local markets. Their products are sourced from eight districts, and sold in the capital city of Thimphu. The initiative's impact is personal and transformative because many women who once struggled for independence and financial security now proudly contribute to their households and communities.

Agribusiness projects have renewed hope for many women. With the support of machinery like induction sealers, food dehydrators, labeling machines, and digital printers, women's groups have enhanced production capacity and elevated product standards. These advancements have boosted confidence, financial independence, and competitiveness in the marketplace.

To continue supporting community driven initiatives, the Bhutan Foundation must have your support.

**Your contribution to the Small Grants Program will support local entrepreneurs, and create lasting change for Bhutanese communities. Between \$5,000 to \$15,000 will fund one or two of these initiatives.**



**Jamyang Choden**  
Program Officer





A KNC farmer removing stems from freshly harvested onions.

## Sustainable Agriculture: Sowing the Seeds for Zhemgang's Youth

Rural communities in Bhutan face growing challenges. With limited economic opportunities, and few avenues for sustainable livelihoods, young people struggle to envision a future for themselves. However, a transformation is taking place in Zhemgang. **Grassroot initiatives and community-led cooperatives are opening doors and providing young people with opportunities in sustainable agriculture.**

In the remote region of Zhemgang, Bhutan, two remarkable cooperatives — Panbang Youth Cooperative (PYC) and Khenrig Namsum Cooperative (KNC) — are sowing seeds for the future of young people in sustainable farming. **These community-driven initiatives are proving that agriculture can be a source of resilience, opportunity, and sustainability for Bhutanese youth and their communities.**

In Lower Zhemgang, PYC is combining tradition with innovation — growing high-value crops like Arabica coffee and raising Bhutan's rare Golden Mahseer fish. PYC is also training students from the local school, and paying a living wage based on international standards. They've introduced a profit-sharing model, created a health fund, and set aside resources for infrastructure and growth. PYC is proving that agriculture can be a respected and sustainable career — one that gives young people purpose and sustainable opportunity in their communities, instead of pushing them to leave the country for work.



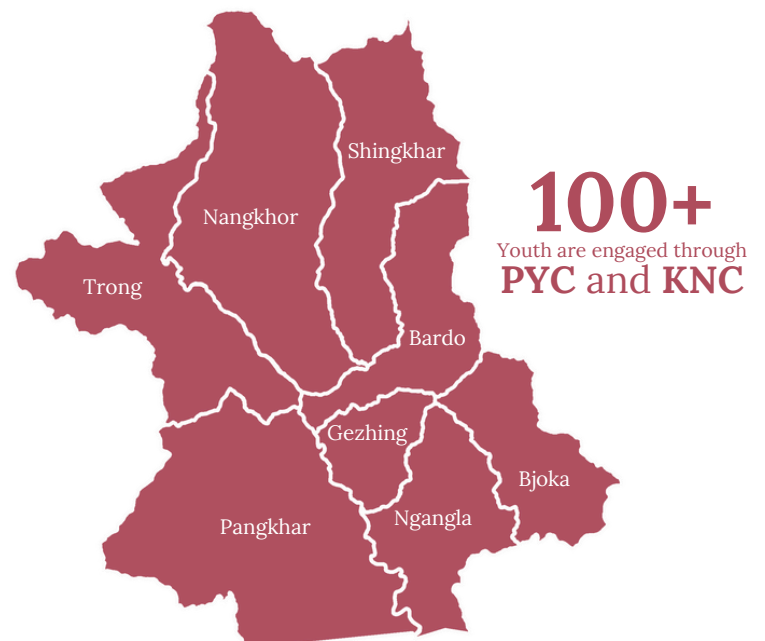


A young Panbang Youth Cooperative member.

Similarly, KNC started in 2016 with just 16 farmers. It has blossomed into a vibrant and thriving cooperative supporting 230+ farmers today. With support from the Bhutan Foundation's Small Grants Program in 2019, the cooperative established itself as a model for onion production in the region. They boosted yields by over 80%, expanded distribution networks and reduced vegetable imports by 70%. Most importantly, KNC created local jobs and hired 70+ youth from their community in sustainable agriculture.

Despite their remarkable progress, KNC now faces an unexpected setback. A devastating fire destroyed their processing plant and reduced the building including all machinery to rubble and ashes. Farmers lost tools essential for preparing, packaging, and selling their crops. Rebuilding the plant will cost **\$150,000**, and without it, over **230 farmers** and more than **70 local youth** employed through the cooperative are at risk of losing their livelihoods. **Please donate today to help rebuild KNC and restore opportunity to this resilient farming community.**

These cooperatives are doing more than growing food. They're building a future — for young people, for communities, and for Bhutan's environment. As these cooperatives continue to grow, they pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable future for Bhutan's agricultural landscape.



**Dechen Wangmo**  
Communications Officer





Local communities harvesting medicinal herbs.

## Preserving Bhutan's Traditional Medicine: A Heritage of Healing

Bhutanese Traditional Medicine is a profound healing system rooted in **gSo-ba Rig-pa** (གསེབ་རིག་པ་) an ancient medical tradition shaped by Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese influences.

Bhutanese Traditional Medicine (BTM) is deeply rooted in Bhutan's Buddhist values, emphasizing a holistic approach to healing - physically, mentally, and spiritually. As a system of medicine that has stood the test of time, **BTM has the potential to lead the global practices in integrative healthcare, offering a sustainable and nature-based alternative to modern medical practices.**

BTM was officially integrated into Bhutan's national healthcare system in 1971 and later enshrined in the constitution in 2008. Today, the Faculty of Traditional Medicine trains practitioners, produces traditional medicines, and carries out research. However, BTM faces several challenges, including limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of global recognition. Additionally, over harvesting of medicinal plants and climate change are threatening Bhutan's biodiversity—the very source of its remedies.







Herbal medicine at the Traditional Medicine Hospital dispensary.

With strategic investment in research and development, policy support, and international partnerships, BTM can emerge as a leading brand in the global wellness and healthcare sector while preserving its deep-rooted cultural values and biodiversity.

The Bhutan Foundation is working with the National Traditional Hospital, Traditional Medicine Institute and the Ministry of Health to strengthen and integrate Bhutanese Traditional Medicine. Together we hope to:

- Improve the quality, safety, and efficacy of traditional medicine practices and products through research, innovation, and sustainable resource management.
- Safeguard Bhutan's cultural heritage and biodiversity, while strengthening traditional medicine knowledge and resources.
- Foster partnerships to enhance advocacy, raise awareness, and integrate Bhutanese Traditional Medicine into the global wellness landscape.

With your support, Bhutanese Traditional Medicine (BTM) can preserve its rich cultural heritage while evolving to meet the healthcare needs of future generations – supporting not only physical healing, but also **mental** and **spiritual well-being**. This growing field also holds promising potential, with opportunities for the promotion and advancement of traditional medicine. **We invite you to join us in advancing this important and exciting journey.**



Traditional medicine and health supplements produced by Menjong Sorig Pharmaceuticals Ltd.



**Kunzang Dorji**  
Communications and IT Officer





A view of the Tashichhoe Dzong and the surrounding capital city of Thimphu.

## Shaping Bhutan's Urban Future: Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Planning

As we build our cities, we recognize the need to grow with values, ensuring that urbanization is **inclusive, accessible, and sustainable**.

Bhutan's cities are growing fast. With rapid urbanization in places like Thimphu and Paro, residents are feeling the pressure — more traffic, crowded housing, aging infrastructure, and increasing vulnerability to climate change. **Without thoughtful planning, this growth could overwhelm the very communities it's meant to support.**

That's why the Bhutan Foundation is supporting the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (MoIT) to train Bhutanese urban planners, architects, and engineers in inclusive, accessible, and sustainable urban planning.







Urban planners from Bhutan's Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport attending the 'Implementation of Design Code' training in Boston, MA.

Earlier this year, a group of Bhutanese planners visited the US to learn from experts at UC Berkeley, Harvard, MIT, and Jonathan Rose Companies. They explored innovative urban planning strategies, including community-driven design, transit-oriented development, and form-based codes, which offer solutions to issues like congestion, infrastructure strain, accessibility and the growing impacts of climate change.

*"Our visit to the Perkins School for the Blind and William E. Carter School further revealed the need to incorporate universal design principles that take into consideration special needs of the users in Bhutan's future urban projects."*

— Sangay Wangdi, Senior Urban Planner

The team also explored how economic hubs like Cambridge benefit from partnerships between universities and local industries, a model that could be adapted in Bhutan to drive innovation and job creation. With these insights, Bhutanese planners are now better equipped to implement sustainable, people-centered urban policies.

Lessons from zoning reforms and mixed-use developments in San Francisco and Boston provide adaptable frameworks to ensure Bhutan's cities remain livable and efficient. These strategies will inform urban planning in Thimphu and Paro, as well as upcoming cities across Bhutan.

Moving forward, continued collaboration with MoIT and international experts will help shape Bhutan's urban policies, ensuring that development is balanced with cultural preservation, climate resilience, and long-term sustainability.



**Sangay Chedar**  
Program Manager





Her Majesty Gyalum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck  
with the Bhutan Foundation Team

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Nazhoen Pelri School

Ogyen Choling Foundation  
Panbang Youth Cooperative  
PHENSEM Parents Support Group  
Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women  
River Guides of Panbang  
Royal Society for the Protection and Care of Animals  
Royal Textile Academy  
Royal Thimphu College  
Royal Society for the Protection of Nature  
Royal Thimphu College  
Royal University of Bhutan  
Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative  
Sherchock Women's Group  
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Yangya Foundation  
Wangduechhoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Center  
Water Bhutan  
WWF-Bhutan  
Zhemgang Dzongkhag Administration

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Perkins School for the Blind  
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Rubin Museum of Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Snow Leopard Conservancy  
Squire Patton Boggs  
Tsao & McKown  
University of Texas at El Paso  
US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation  
US Department of State  
Yale University





## Make a Planned Gift: Leave a Lasting Legacy

The Bhutan Foundation encourages you to explore the philanthropic tools available through Planned Giving. You may be surprised to learn of the powerful impact you can have through a Charitable Lead Trust, Charitable Remainder Trusts, Insurance, Donor Advised Funds and of course, your Will.

Planned gifts help build strategic reserves, support long-term growth, and fund transformative projects. We invite you to consider leaving a legacy that reflects your values and helps shape Bhutan's future. Should you wish to discuss your plans with us, please call David Chalfant, Director of Partnerships and Philanthropy at 202-609-7363.

When making a bequest, please use our full legal name:

**Bhutan Foundation, Inc.**

Federal Tax ID #13-3376290





## Ways to Give

*Your donation will make a lasting impact in advancing Gross National Happiness in Bhutan, which include supporting conservation of the environment, promotion of equitable and sustainable development, good governance, and preservation of culture. Thank you for your generous support!*

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Washington, DC 20036

### To Make a Wire Transfer, Stock Gift, or a gift from your Donor Advised Fund

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## Contact Us

### Washington, DC

The Bhutan Foundation  
1050 Connecticut Ave NW#66013  
Washington, DC 20036  
Tel: +1.202.609.7363  
Email: [info@bhutanfound.org](mailto:info@bhutanfound.org)

### Thimphu, Bhutan

The Bhutan Foundation  
Nazhoen Pelri Youth Center  
PO Box 1918  
Thimphu, Bhutan  
Tel: +975.2.322751  
Email: [info@bhutanfound.org](mailto:info@bhutanfound.org)

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