

Information for Participants

International Conference on Gross National Happiness, 'From GNH Philosophy to Praxis and Policy'

4-6 Nov 2015 – Paro, Bhutan

Information for participants

This document provides essential information for our esteemed participants in the upcoming GNH conference. Please note the airport procedures. You will also find information on on-site service tent that provides facilities such as indigenous medical facilities, money exchange, the sale of Bhutanese stamps and SIM cards, an information stall and support for press and the media. You will also find other useful facts regarding the conference venue, specially designed tents on the lawns of Ugyen Pelri Palace, and sights in Paro and the surrounding area.

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1. General information

1. 1. Conference venue

Conference venue is at the Ugyen Pelri Palace Lawn. The Ugyen Pelri Palace is in a secluded compound on the south side of the Pa chu (river) and west side of Paro Ringpung Dzong (fortress).

The Palace is one of the most beautiful examples of Bhutanese architecture. Paro Penlop Tshering Penjor built it in the early 1900s, designed after Guru Rinpoche's celestial paradise known as Zangdo Pelri.

1. 2. WIFI coverage

CBS offers free WiFi coverage in and around the conference

venue. Hotel Internet provisions vary.

1. 3. Telephone

The international dialing code for the Bhutan on a mobile number is +975 – mobile number.

A sample call to mobile number in Bhutan is

+975 17_____ with Bhutan Telecom service or

+975 77_____ with Tashi cell service

For fixed line, you need to add area code for Paro, which is 8. So, on a fixed line the international dialing code is +975-8-fixed line number.

A sample call from US to a landline in Paro is +975 8 _____

1. 4. Transportation

For participants for whom CBS will be bearing local hospitality, there will be transportation services available to and from the airport to the respective hotels and to and from conference venue to respective hotels.

Public taxis are available at the airport. These are safe to use. The average fare is around 80 Ngultrum from the airport to Paro town. The conference venue is about 10 minutes walk from the Paro town.

5. Airport information

Important: please bring a hard copy print out of your visa, as this will be required in order to board your flight to Bhutan. Electronic copies are not accepted.

Upon arrival to Bhutan, you will need to pay 2500 Ngultrum, roughly 40 dollars, to immigration at the Paro International Airport even with gratis visa.

When you disembark the aircraft you will be directed to the immigration room. Please go to the Bank of Bhutan window at the right of that room, and change cash into 2500 Ngultrum. Then please enter the line marked 'Participants for GNH conference'. You will need to produce your hard copy visa letter, passport, and pay the 2500 Ngultrum (for which you will be given a receipt) in order to receive the visa.

6. Weather

It's late autumn during the conference in Bhutan. In November, the average temperature in Paro is 14 degrees during the day and 8 degrees during the night. Please dress warmly for the morning sessions, and with layers that can be adjusted.

1. 7. Conference lunch and dinner

All conference food will be locally prepared. Rice is the main staple food in Bhutan. Rice is usually accompanied by one or two side dishes. Vegetarian side dishes are widely available, but some meat will be provided. Chilies are an essential part of nearly every dish in Bhutan. Grains such as rice, buckwheat and barley are also cultivated in various regions of the country depending on the local climate.

8. Shopping

Shops in Bhutan are usually open 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Paro town caters to many textiles, handicraft and souvenir shops. You can buy handicrafts such as carpets, colorful masks, jewelry, hand-woven bamboo items, handmade paper products, Buddhist paintings and thangkas or religious paintings. Hand made wooden bowls called dappa, honey, and textiles are popular souvenirs.

1. 9. Cultural entertainment

Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA) will perform cultural

entertainment such as Bhutanese traditional dances and masked dances during tea and lunch breaks of the conference.

1. 10. Sightseeing

There are many historical and spiritual sights in Paro. You might be interested in visiting the following.

1. Ringpung Dzong

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the first spiritual and temporal ruler of Bhutan, built it in 1646. The Dzong houses the political and spiritual institutions: the monastic body of Paro, the office of the Dzongda (district administrative head) and the Thrimpoen (district judge). A traditional bridge connects the Dzong to the road.

1. Ta Dzong

This is a watchtower built to defend Ringpung Dzong during the inter-valley wars in the 17th century. Ta Dzong serves as the National Museum of the country. It holds fascinating collection of art, relics, religious paintings and Bhutan's exquisite postage stamps.

1. Drugyel Dzong

The Dzong with a delightful village nestling at its foot was built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to commemorate a victory over the Tibetan invaders. The glory of Drugyel Dzong remained even after it was destroyed by fire in 1951.

1. Kyichu Temple (or Lhakhang)

Kyichu is one of the oldest and most sacred temples of Bhutan dating back to 7th century. Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo built the lhakhang. It is a little outside of Paro town, but it is worth a visit and a moment of stillness.

1. Taktshang lhakhang (Tiger's nest)

Tiger's nest is the most familiar image in Bhutan, being one of the most famous and sacred monasteries in Bhutan. It is perched on the side of cliff, which is 900 meters above Paro valley. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated and hence it is called 'Tiger's nest'. Fast walkers can reach in well under two hours; amblers in 3 or 4, and horses are available for hire.

2. *Service Tent Facilities and Services*

One of the tents onsite will host a range of useful services. These include:

1. 1. Conference secretariat

A conference secretariat will be set up at the Service tent. It will provide basic amenities like printing, photocopying, conference related inquiry and inquiry on flight date changes.

The conference secretariat will also maintain a registration counter. Please register yourselves on 4th November from 8:00 a.m.

1. 2. Media working arrangements, briefings and inquiries

The conference secretariat will provide working space for journalists. It will provide press releases and briefs for interested journalists covering the conference and GNH Index. It will also respond to inquiries and arrange interviews. We warmly welcome your participation by twitter: the hashtag will be posted at the venue.

1. 3. Mobile and SIM card services

You can purchase a SIM card and voucher from Bhutan Telecom Limited (BTL) counter in the Service tent on the Conference

site. BTL will also provide convenient, low cost mobile/cell phone rental services for the conference duration.

1. 4. Foreign currency exchange services

There is a currency exchange service counter managed by Bank of Bhutan (BoB) in the Service tent. The exchanges will be made at real time exchange rates provided by Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan (RMA).

1. 5. Bhutanese stamps, albums and postcards

The Bhutan Post Office has a popular selection of assorted Bhutanese stamps, albums, postcards and commemorative items for sale in the Service tent. The purchases will be made in cash only. Credit cards and cheques are not accepted.

1. 6. Medical services

1. a. Medical aid clinic

On-site medical and paramedical personnel from Paro District Hospital will be available to respond to medical needs as they arise, including medical emergencies. Please enquire in the service tent.

1. b. Indigenous medical services

The Institute of Traditional Medicine Services of Bhutan (ITMS) will maintain a counter in the Service tent displaying traditional medicines produced in its laboratories from minerals, animal parts, precious metals, gems and plants. Therapeutically, the Bhutanese rely on herbal combinations, limited acupuncture therapy (including use of the golden needle), applications of heat (usually with metal rods). The Indigenous medical service counter will provide medical consultations and treatments.

1. 7. Live demonstration and product exhibitions of

paintings, wood carving, embroidery, sculpture and traditional boot making

The National Institute for Zorig Chusum will be displaying live demonstrations and product exhibitions. You may wish to visit and find out more!

We hope you enjoy your stay for the GNH Conference!