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Press Release

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Bhutan reopens its borders with new tourism strategy

- *Strategy underpinned by enhancements to sustainable development policies, elevation of guest experience and infrastructure upgrades*
 - *Bhutan unveils new national brand: 'Believe'*

BHUTAN, September 22, 2022. The Kingdom of Bhutan today reopens its borders to international guests following the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has unveiled a new tourism strategy, underpinned by transformations in three key areas: enhancements to its sustainable development policies, infrastructure upgrades, and the elevation of the guest experience.

“Bhutan’s noble policy of High Value, Low Volume tourism has existed since we started welcoming guests to our country in 1974. But its intent and spirit were watered down over the years, without us even realising it. Therefore, as we reset as a nation after this pandemic, and officially open our doors to visitors today, we are reminding ourselves about the essence of the policy, the values and merits that have defined us for generations,” said H.E. Dr. Lotay Tshering, the Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan.

“We must also ensure that we are a high value society, one that is infused with sincerity, integrity and principles, where people must always live in safe communities, among serene environments and derive comfort from the finest facilities. Typically, “high value” is understood as exclusive high-end products and extravagant recreational facilities. But that is not Bhutan. And, “low volume” doesn’t mean limiting the number of visitors. We will appreciate everyone who visits us to treasure our values, while we also learn as much from them. If that is what you are searching for, there is no limit or restriction. The best conduit to realising our vision are our youth and professionals in the tourism industry. While those working in the tourism sector will represent us at the forefront, the entire nation is the tourism industry, and every Bhutanese a host. The minimum fee we are asking our friends to pay is to be reinvested in ourselves, the place of our meeting, which will be our shared asset for generations. Welcome to Bhutan,” H.E Dr. Lotay added.

Enhancements to Bhutan’s sustainable development policies

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Bhutan recently announced that it would raise its Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) from USD 65 to USD 200 per person, per night, which will go towards projects that support Bhutan's economic, social, environmental and cultural development.* The fees raised will fund national investment in programmes that preserve Bhutan's cultural traditions, as well as sustainability projects, infrastructure upgrades and opportunities for youth – as well as providing free healthcare and education for all. For instance, some of the Sustainable Development Fee funds go towards offsetting the carbon footprint of visitors by planting trees, upskilling workers in the tourism sector, cleaning and maintaining trails, reducing the country's reliance on fossil fuels and electrifying Bhutan's transportation sector, among other projects.

As a country that is vulnerable to the effects of climate change (experiencing melting glaciers, floods and unpredictable weather patterns), Bhutan will also be stepping up its efforts to maintain its status as one of only a handful of carbon-negative countries in the world – in 2021, Bhutan sequestered 9.4 million tonnes of carbon against its emission capacity of 3.8 million tonnes.

“Beyond protecting Bhutan's natural environment, the SDF will also be directed towards activities that preserve Bhutan's built and living cultural heritage, including architecture and traditional values, as well as meaningful environmental projects. Our future requires us to protect our heritage, and to forge fresh pathways for forthcoming generations,” said Mr. Dorji Dhradhul, Director General of the Tourism Council of Bhutan.

“We need tourism to not only benefit Bhutan economically, but socially as well, while maintaining our low sustainable footprint. The goal of our new strategy is to create high value experiences for guests, in addition to well-paying and professional jobs for our citizens. This is our moment of evolution and we invite our guests to become our partners in this transformative moment,” Dhradhul added.

Infrastructure upgrades

In line with this, the government used the period during the COVID-19 shutdown to upgrade roads, trails, temples and monuments around the country, upgrade public bathroom facilities, organise rubbish clean-up events, enhance the standards and certification process for tourism service providers (such as hotels, guides, tour operators and drivers). Employees across the tourism industry were required to participate in upskilling programmes to focus on enhancing service quality.

Elevation of the guest experience

“We know that our new SDF brings with it a certain expectation when it comes to standards of quality and service, so we are committed to enhancing the guest experience – whether that is through the quality of services received, the cleanliness and accessibility of our infrastructure, by limiting the number of cars on our roads, or by limiting the number of people who visit our sacred sites. By doing so, we protect the experience for visitors to Bhutan, as we must be able to provide authentic experiences supported by world-class services and personal care. We also plan to work with our tourism partners to continue to upgrade the itineraries that guests can experience in our country – to help showcase the very best that Bhutan has to offer. We hope that visitors to Bhutan will notice and welcome these changes, and we very much look forward to welcoming all guests to Bhutan,” concluded H.E. Dr. Tandi Dorji, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The revamp of Bhutan's tourism comes amid a widespread ‘transformation project’ rolled out across the country, from the civil service to the financial sector. The changes are geared towards developing Bhutan's human capital by equipping the population with more proficient skills, knowledge and experiences.

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During a special ceremony in the capital city Thimphu yesterday (September 22, 2022), a new brand for Bhutan was also unveiled by H.E. Dr. Lotay Tshering, Honourable Prime Minister, in the presence of other government officials and dignitaries. 'Brand Bhutan' aims to capture the optimism and renewed ambition of the kingdom as it opens its doors to guests once again, as well as communicating its promise and plans for its young citizens. Bhutan's new tagline, Believe, reflects this determined focus on the future, as well as the transformative journeys experienced by its guests. More information can be found at the new website, www.Bhutan.travel

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For more information about visiting Bhutan, visit: www.bhutan.travel/

A selection of high-resolution images can be downloaded [here](#).

***Other changes to the SDF:**

- The previously stipulated Minimum Daily Package Rate (MDPR) has been removed. This gives visitors the flexibility to engage service providers directly, or book flights, hotels and tours in Bhutan themselves.
- Guests from India will pay a previously stipulated fee, which will be revised at a later date.
- In previous years, the SDF was USD 65 per person (plus a USD 40 per person, per night fee for individual travellers). There will be a concessionary levy of 50% on the SDF for children between the ages of 6 to 12 years, and exemptions of the SDF for children aged 5 years and below.

About the Tourism Council of Bhutan

The Tourism Council of Bhutan is responsible for the development and promotion of sustainable tourism in Bhutan. It works to share the Kingdom's remarkable places, people and experiences with conscious travellers, guided by the principles of high value, low volume tourism.

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