



# BHUTAN



## Quick Facts

Population -----	691,000
Official language-----	Bhutanese
Capital -----	Thimphu
Government -----	Constitutional Monarchy & Democracy
Religion -----	Buddhist (65-75%), Hinduism

## Interesting Information

Bhutan is considered to be one of the most isolated countries in the world due to the government's deliberation in controlling foreign tourism & influence in an effort to preserve traditional culture and practice. As a result, it is also considered to be one of the least developed countries in the world with regulated internet access and television first introduced in 1999. There is huge emphasis put on environmental preservation, with the constitution stating that the nation must maintain at least 60% forest cover at all times.

## Bhutanese Refugees

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In the early 1990's, almost 1/6 of Bhutan's population was stripped of its citizenship and forced into exile in a government effort to homogenize Bhutanese culture. The majority of these individuals were Lhotshampas (heterogeneous Nepalese in origin), one of three major ethnic groups in the country living in Bhutan. Many of these individuals had been living in southern Bhutan since as early as 1890, when the government petitioned Nepali speaking workers to clear farmland in southern Bhutan. A citizenship act in 1958 granted these "foreign" workers settled in Bhutan full rights and official Bhutanese citizenship.

Taking a firm stance on preserving traditional culture, the government shifted courses in 1985 with a number of integration attempts in response to the different cultural practices of the Lhotshampas. Attempts included the construction of Buddhist temples in primarily Hindu practicing areas, a dress code, the relocation of students in secondary school (for cultural integration in greater Bhutan), banning of the Nepali and Hindi languages in schools and the promotion of intermarriage between ethnic groups. At the same time, a new citizenship act passed into law, tightening citizenship requirements and deeming any act of disloyalty to the state potential justification for citizenship removal. Further measures in 1988 forced individuals to provide land tax receipts (often impossible to obtain) to prove their ties to Bhutan. After protesters demanded cultural rights and protection in 1990, a wave of violence, arbitrary detainment, rape and the forced signing of migration forms prevailed.

Following this unrest, over 1/6 of Bhutan's population sought asylum, primarily in Nepal where emergency refugee camps were constructed, with some of them fleeing into neighboring India and other countries. Despite peace marches and endless negotiations, no results or progress were to speak of between 1990 and 2006. Declared a state of emergency, and with conditions in the camps worsening, the US offered to resettle 60,000 of the estimated 107,000 Bhutanese refugees in 1996.



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