

# Language

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The official language of Bhutan is Dzongkha. While Dzongkha uses the same 'Ucen script as Tibetan – and the two languages are closely related – Dzongkha is sufficiently different that Tibetans cannot understand it. English is the medium of instruction in schools, so most educated people can speak it fluently. There are English signboards, books and menus throughout the country. Road signs and government documents are all written in both English and Dzongkha. The national newspaper, *Kuensel*, is published in three languages: English, Dzongkha and Nepali. In the monastic schools Choekey, the classical Tibetan language, is taught.

In eastern Bhutan most people speak Sharchop (meaning 'language of the east'), which is totally different from Dzongkha. In the south, most people speak Nepali. As a result of the isolation of many parts of the country, a number of languages other than Dzongkha and Sharchop survive. Some are so different that people from different parts of the country can't understand each other. Bumthangkha is a language of the Bumthang region, and it's common for regional minorities have their own language. Other tongues in Bhutan's Tower of Babel are Khengkha from Zhamgang, Kurtoep from Lhuentse, Mangdep from Trongsa and Dzala from Trashi Yangtse.

The Dzongkha Development Commission has established a system for transliterating Dzongkha into Roman script. This official system uses three accent marks: the

apostrophe to represent a high tone (eg 'ne) or a 'soft' consonant (eg g'); a circumflex accent (eg ê) to represent long vowels; and a diaeresis (eg ö), which alters pronunciation in different ways, depending on the vowel (see Vowels, below). The system also attempts to represent sounds in Dzongkha that don't occur in English, such as retroflex and aspirated consonants. In this language guide a simplified system is used, with the primary aim being ease of communication at the risk of imperfect pronunciation. In the rest of this book, no accent marks are used in the Romanisations.

## PRONUNCIATION

### Vowels

<b>a</b>	as in 'father'
<b>ä</b>	as the 'a' in 'hat'
<b>e</b>	as the 'ey' in 'hey'
<b>i</b>	as in 'hit'
<b>o</b>	as in 'go'
<b>ö</b>	as the 'ir' in 'dirt' (without the 'r' sound)
<b>u</b>	as in 'jute'
<b>ü</b>	like saying 'i' with the lips stretched back

### Consonants

Most consonants in Roman Dzongkha are pronounced as in English. The following list covers letters and sounds that might prove troublesome.

An 'h' after the consonants **c, d, g, l, p** and **t** indicates that they are 'aspirated' (released with a slight puff of air) – listen to the 'p' sounds in 'pip'; the first is aspirated, the second is not. While getting aspiration wrong can have a direct impact on the meaning, it shouldn't be a problem with the words and phrases in this guide.

<b>c</b>	as the 'ch' in 'church'
<b>ng</b>	as in 'sing'; practise using the 'ng' sound at the beginning of a word, eg <i>ngawang</i> (a name)
<b>sh</b>	as in 'ship'
<b>t, th</b>	'dental' consonants, pronounced with the tongue tip against the teeth
<b>zh</b>	as the 's' in 'measure'

## CONVERSATION &amp; ESSENTIALS

Hello.	<i>kuzuzangbo la</i>
Goodbye.	
(person leaving)	<i>lāzhimbe jōn</i>
(person staying)	<i>lāzhimbe zhū</i>
Good luck.	<i>trashi dele</i>
Thank you.	<i>kadriche</i>
Yes.	<i>ing/yō</i>
No.	<i>mé</i>
Maybe.	<i>im ong</i>
(Hello) How are you?	<i>chō gadebe yō?</i>
I'm fine.	<i>nga lāzhimbe ra yō</i>
Where are you going?	<i>chō gāti jou mo?</i>
What's your name?	<i>chō meng gaci mo?</i>
My name is ...	<i>ngē meng ... ing</i>
Where are you from?	<i>chō gāti lā mo?</i>
I'm from ...	<i>nga ... lā ing</i>
I'm staying at ...	<i>nga ... dōp ing</i>
What is this?	<i>dī gaci mo?</i>
It's cold today.	<i>dari jām-mā</i>
It's raining.	<i>chāp cap dowā</i>
I know.	<i>nga shē</i>
I don't know.	<i>nga mi shē</i>
Can I take a photo?	<i>pā tabney chokar la?</i>
May I take your photo?	<i>chōgi pā ci tapge mā?</i>
That's OK.	<i>dī tupbā</i>

mother	<i>ama</i>
father	<i>apa</i>
daughter	<i>bum</i>
son	<i>bu</i>
elder sister	<i>azhim</i>
younger sister	<i>num/sim</i>
elder brother	<i>phōgem</i>
younger brother	<i>nucu</i>
friend	<i>tatsha/chāro</i>

happy	<i>gatokto</i>
enough	<i>tupbā/lāmmā</i>
cheap	<i>khetokto</i>
expensive	<i>gong bōm</i>
big	<i>bōm</i>
small	<i>chungku</i>
clean	<i>tsangtokto</i>
dirty	<i>khamlōsisi</i>
good	<i>lāzhim</i>
not good	<i>lāzhim mindu</i>
heavy	<i>jice</i>
this	<i>dī</i>
that	<i>aphidi</i>
mine	<i>ngēgi</i>

yours	<i>chōgi</i>
his/hers	<i>khogi/mogi</i>

## DIRECTIONS &amp; TRANSPORT

What time does the bus leave?	<i>drülkhor chutshō gademi kha jou inna?</i>
I want to get off here.	<i>nga nā dōgobe</i>
Is it near?	<i>bolokha in-na?</i>
Is it far?	<i>tha ringsa in-na?</i>
Go straight ahead.	<i>thrangdī song</i>

left	<i>ōm</i>
right	<i>yāp</i>
here	<i>nā/nālu</i>
there	<i>phā/phālu</i>
where	<i>gāti</i>
which	<i>gade</i>
in front of	<i>dongkha</i>
next to	<i>bolokha</i>
behind	<i>japkha</i>
opposite	<i>dongko/dongte</i>
north	<i>bjang</i>
south	<i>lho</i>
east	<i>shā</i>
west	<i>nup</i>

## HEALTH &amp; EMERGENCIES

I'm ill.	<i>nga nau mā</i>
I feel nauseous.	<i>nga cūni zum beu mā</i>
I feel weak.	<i>nga thangchep mā</i>
I keep vomiting.	<i>nga cūp cūsara dōp mā</i>
I feel dizzy.	<i>nga guyu khōu mā</i>
I'm having trouble breathing.	<i>nga bung tang mit shubā</i>
doctor	<i>drungtsho</i>
fever	<i>jangshu</i>
pain	<i>nazu</i>

## NUMBERS

1	<i>ci</i>
2	<i>nyī</i>
3	<i>sum</i>
4	<i>zhi</i>
5	<i>nga</i>
6	<i>drū</i>
7	<i>dūn</i>
8	<i>gā</i>
9	<i>gu</i>
10	<i>cuthām</i>
11	<i>cūci</i>
12	<i>cunyi</i>
13	<i>cūsu</i>
14	<i>cūzhi</i>
15	<i>cānga</i>

16	<i>cūdru</i>
17	<i>cupdū</i>
18	<i>cōpgā</i>
19	<i>cūgu</i>
20	<i>nyishu/khāchi</i>
25	<i>nyishu tsanga</i>
30	<i>sumcu or khā pcheda nyi</i>
40	<i>zhipcu/khānyi</i>
50	<i>ngapcu or khā pcheda sum</i>
60	<i>drukcu/khāsum</i>
70	<i>dūncu or khā pcheda zhi</i>
80	<i>gepcu/khāzhi</i>
90	<i>gupcu or khā pcheda nga</i>
100	<i>cikja/khānga</i>
1000	<i>ciktong or tongthra ci</i>
10,000	<i>cikthri</i>
100,000	<i>cikbum/bum</i>
1,000,000	<i>saya ci</i>

## SHOPPING &amp; SERVICES

The word *khang* means building; in many cases it's only necessary to add the kind of building.

Where is a ....?	<i>... gāti mo?</i>
bank	<i>ngūkha</i>
book shop	<i>pekha</i>
cinema	<i>loknyen</i>
hospital	<i>menkha</i>
market	<i>throm</i>
monastery	<i>goemba</i>
police station	<i>thrimsung gakpi mākha</i>
post office	<i>dremkha</i>
public telephone	<i>manggi jūthrin tangsi</i>
shop	<i>tshongkha</i>
temple	<i>lhakhang</i>
toilet	<i>chapsa</i>

Where is the toilet?	<i>chapsa gāti in-na?</i>
How far is the ...?	<i>... gadeci tha ringsa mo?</i>
I want to see ...	<i>nga ... tagobe</i>
I'm looking for ...	<i>nga ... tau ing</i>
What time does it open?	<i>chutshō gademā lu go pchiu mo?</i>
What time does it close?	<i>chutshō gademā lu go dam mo?</i>
Is it still open?	<i>datoya pchidi ong ga?</i>
What is this?	<i>dī gaci mo?</i>
I want to change money.	<i>nga tiru sōgobā</i>

Bargaining is not a Bhutanese tradition, but if you are buying Bhutanese handicrafts at the weekend market, you might be able to lower the price a bit.

How much is it?	<i>dilu gadeci mo?</i>
That's too much.	<i>gong bōm mā</i>
I'll give you no more than ...	<i>ngāgi ... anemci lā trō mitshube</i>
What's your best price?	<i>gong gademcibe bjinni?</i>

## TIME &amp; DATE

What is the time?	<i>chutshō gademci mo?</i>
Five o'clock.	<i>chutshō nga</i>
today	<i>dari</i>
tomorrow	<i>nāba</i>
day after tomorrow	<i>nātshe</i>
yesterday	<i>khatsha</i>
sometime	<i>retshe kap</i>
morning	<i>drōba</i>
afternoon	<i>pchiru</i>
day night	<i>nyim, za numu</i>

Sunday	<i>za dau</i>
Monday	<i>za mīma</i>
Tuesday	<i>za lhap</i>
Wednesday	<i>za phup</i>
Thursday	<i>za pāsa</i>
Friday	<i>za pēm</i>
Saturday	<i>za nyim</i>

## TREKKING &amp; COUNTRY LIFE

Which trail goes to ...?	<i>... josi lam gāti mo?</i>
Is the trail steep?	<i>lam zādra yō-ga?</i>
Where is my tent?	<i>ngē gū dī gāti in-na?</i>
What's the name of this village?	<i>Ani ūgi meng gaci zeu mo?</i>

house	<i>chim</i>
steep uphill	<i>khagen gādra</i>
steep downhill	<i>lam khamā zādra</i>
tired	<i>udū/thangche</i>
cold (weather)	<i>sitraktra</i>
warm (weather)	<i>drotokto/tshatokto</i>
alpine hut	<i>bjōbi gā</i>
alpine pasture	<i>la nogi tsamjo</i>
bridge	<i>zam</i>
hills	<i>ri</i>
lake	<i>tsho</i>
mountain	<i>gangri</i>
mountain pass	<i>la</i>
mule track	<i>ta lam</i>
plain or meadow	<i>thang</i>
prayer flag	<i>dāshi</i>
river	<i>chhu/tsangchhu</i>
stone carved with prayers	<i>dogi mani</i>

**trail** *lam/kanglam*  
**village** *ü*

### **Animals & Crops**

**bird, chicken** *bjä*  
**cow** *ba*  
**dog** *rochi/chi*  
**horse** *ta*  
**pig** *phap*

**water buffalo** *mahe*  
**yak (male/female)** *yâ/jim*  
**barley** *nâ*  
**buckwheat** *bjö*  
**corn (maize)** *gäza/gesasip*  
**millet** *membja*  
**standing rice** *bjä*  
**husked rice** *chum*  
**wheat** *kâ*

# Glossary

**ABTO** – Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators

**anim** – Buddhist nun

**anim goemba** – nunnery

**arra** – home-made spirit distilled from barley, wheat or rice

**ashi** – title for a queen or lady of aristocracy

**atsara** – masked clown that badgers the crowd at a tsechu

**bangchung** – round bamboo basket with a tight-fitting cover

**bey-yul** – Hidden land of the Himalaya and a Buddhist refuge in times of trouble

**BHU** – Basic Health Unit

**bodhisattva** – a being who has the capacity of gaining Buddhahood in this life, but who refuses it in order to be reincarnated in the world to help other beings

**Bon** – ancient, pre-Buddhist, animistic religion of Tibet; its practitioners are called Bon-po

**Brokpa** – minority group in eastern Bhutan

**BTCL** – Bhutan Tourism Corporation Limited

**bukhari** – wood-burning stove

**bumpa** – vase, usually used to contain holy water in *goembas*

**cairn** – pile of stones marking a trail or pass

**carom** – a game similar to snooker or pool played on a small wooden board using checkers instead of billiard balls

**cham** – dance

**chang** – north

**chapati** – flat unleavened bread

**chhang** – beer made from rice, corn or millet, pronounced ‘chung’

**chhu** – river, also water

**chilip** – foreigner

**chimi** – member of the National Assembly

**Choekey** – classical Tibetan (the language of religion)

**choesham** – altar or shrine room

**choesum** – chapel

**chorten** – stone Buddhist monument, often containing relics

**chugo** – hard, dried yak cheese

**dal** – lentil soup

**Dantak** – Indian Border Roads Task Force

**dasho** – honorary title conferred by the king

**datho** – astrological calendar

**datse** – traditional archery

**deb raja** – British term for the *desi* during the period 1652–1907

**desi** – secular ruler of Bhutan

**dharma** – Buddhist teachings

**dharma raja** – British name for the Zhabdrung, the religious ruler, during period 1652–1907

**dochey** – inner courtyard of a *dzong*

**dotsho** – hot-stone bath

**doma** – betel nut, also known by its Indian name, *paan*

**dorji** – a stylised thunderbolt used in rituals; *vajra* in Sanskrit

**DOT** – Department of Tourism

**drak** – cave or hermitage

**dratshang** – central monk body

**driglam chhoesum** – code of etiquette

**driglam namzha** – traditional values and etiquette

**drubda** – meditation centre for monks

**Druk Gyalpo** – the king of Bhutan

**Drukpa Kagyu** – the official religion of Bhutan, a school of tantric *Mahayana* Buddhism

**drungkhag** – subdistrict

**dukhang** – assembly hall in a *goemba*; also called a *tshokhang*

**dungpa** – head of a subdistrict

**dzong** – fort-monastery

**dzongdag** – district administrator

**Dzongkha** – national language of Bhutan

**dzongkhag** – district

**dzongpen** – old term for lord of the *dzong*

**gakpa** – police

**gangri** – snow mountain

**gewog** – block, the lowest administrative level

**gho** – traditional dress for men

**global positioning system (GPS)** – a device that calculates position and elevation by reading and decoding signals from satellites

**goemba** – a *Mahayana* Buddhist monastery

**goenkhang** – chapel devoted to protective and terrifying deities, usually *Mahakala*

**gomchen** – lay or married monk

**gorikha** – porch of a *lhakhang*, literally ‘mouth of the door’

**GSI** – Geological Survey of India

**gup** – elected leader of a village

**Guru Rinpoche** – the common name of Padmasambhava, the founder of *Mahayana* Buddhism

**gyalpo** – ruler or king

**himal** – Sanskrit word for mountain

**IMTRAT** – Indian Military Training Team

**Je Khenpo** – Chief Abbot of Bhutan  
**jogyig** – Bhutanese cursive script

**kabney** – scarf worn over the shoulder on formal occasions

**khandroma** – a female celestial being; dakini in Sanskrit

**khenpo** – abbot

**khonying** – archway chorten

**kira** – traditional dress for women

**kora** – circumambulation

**kuru** – a game played with large darts thrown 20m to a small target

**la** – mountain pass

**lam** – path or road

**lama** – *Mahayana* Buddhist teacher or priest

**lha** – god or deity

**lhakhang** – temple, literally ‘god house’

**lhentshog** – commission

**lho** – south

**Lhotshampa** – southern Bhutanese people, mainly Nepali-speaking

**lopon** – Senior monk or teacher

**Losar** – Bhutanese and Tibetan New Year

**lu** – serpent deities, called *naga* in Sanskrit

**lyonpo** – government minister

**Mahakala** – Yeshe Goenpo, the guardian god of Bhutan, who manifests himself as a raven

**Mahayana** – school of Buddhism, literally ‘great vehicle’

**mandala** – cosmic diagram; *kyilkhor* in *Dzongkha*

**mani stone** – stone carved with the Buddhist mantra *om mani peme hum*

**mantra** – prayer formula or chant

**momo** – a steamed or fried dumpling

**moraine** – ridge of rocks that a glacier pushed up along its edges (a medial moraine) or at its foot (a terminal moraine)

**nakey** – fiddlehead fern frond

**naktshang** – temple dedicated to warlord or protective deity, literally ‘place of vows’

**NCCA** – National Commission for Cultural Affairs

**ney** – sacred site

**NGO** – nongovernment organisation

**ngultrum** – unit of Bhutanese currency

**nup** – west

**NWAB** – National Women’s Association of Bhutan

**Nyingma** – lineage of Himalayan Buddhism; its practitioners are Nyingmapa

**om mani peme hum** – sacred Buddhist mantra, roughly translates as ‘hail to the jewel in the lotus’

**outreach clinic** – health posts in remote villages

**PCO** – Public Call Office

**penlop** – regional governor, literally lord-teacher

**phajo** – priest

**prayer flag** – long strips of cloth printed with prayers that are ‘said’ whenever the flag flaps in the wind

**prayer wheel** – cylindrical wheel inscribed with, and containing, prayers

**PWD** – Public Works Department

**rabdey** – district monk body

**rachu** – shoulder cloth worn by women on formal occasions

**RBA** – Royal Bhutan Army

**RBG** – Royal Body Guard

**BBP** – Royal Bhutan Police

**rigney** – name used for a school for traditional studies

**rinpoche** – reincarnate lama, usually the abbot of a *goemba*

**river left** – the left bank of a river when facing downstream

**river right** – the right bank of a river when facing downstream

**RSPN** – Royal Society for Protection of Nature

**SAARC** – South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation.

This includes the seven countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**Sakyamuni** – one name for Gautama Buddha, the Historical Buddha

**shar** – east

**shedra** – Buddhist college

**shing** – wood

**shunglam** – highway

**sonam** – good luck

**stupa** – hemispherical Buddhist structure from which the *chorten* evolved

**terma** – texts and artefacts hidden by *Guru Rinpoche*

**terton** – discoverer of *terma*

**thang** – plain

**thangka** – painted or embroidered religious picture

**thondrol** – huge *thangka* that is unfurled on special occasions, literally ‘liberation on sight’

**thos** – a heap of stones representing the guardians of the four directions

**thukpa** – noodles, often served in a soup

**torma** – ritual cake made of *tsampa*, butter and sugar

**trulku** – a reincarnation; the spiritual head of a *goemba*

**Tsa-Wa-Sum** – Government, Country and King

**tsachhu** – hot spring

**tsampa** – barley flour, a staple food in hill villages

**tseri** – the practice of shifting cultivation

**tshamkhang** – small meditation quarters

**tsha-tsha** – small images moulded in clay

**tsho** – lake

**Tshogdu** – National Assembly

**tshokhang** – assembly hall in a *lhakhang*

**tsip** – lay monk

**UNCDF** – UN Capital Development Fund

**utse** – the central tower that houses the *lhakhang* in a *dzong*

**WWF** – World Wide Fund for Nature (known as the World Wildlife Fund in North America)

**yak** – main beast of burden and form of cattle above 3000m elevation

**yathra** – strips of woven woollen cloth

**yeti** – the abominable snowman

**Zangto Pelri** – the celestial abode or paradise of *Guru Rinpoche*

**Zhabdrung, the** – title of the reincarnations of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

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