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Bhutan

Country name	Bhutan
State title	Kingdom of Bhutan
Name of citizen	Bhutanese
Official languages	Dzongkha (*dzo*)[1]
Country name in official languages	འབྲུག་ཡུལ་ (Druk Yul)
State title in official languages	འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ (Druk Yul Khap)
Script	Tibetan (Dzongkha)
Romanization System	Dzongkha romanization system, adopted by BGN and PCGN in 2010
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	BT/BTN
English conventional name for capital	Thimphu
Local name of capital	ཐིམ་ཕུག (Thimphu)
Population / area	777,400[2] / 38,394km^2

Introduction

Bhutan is a small, landlocked kingdom between India and China. The topography and climate is very diverse: subtropical in the south, rising to temperate in the central river valleys and characterised by the 7000m peaks of the eastern Himalayas in the north.

Historically, Bhutan has been highly secluded, with no television or internet until 1999. Over the past decades the country has opened somewhat, and in this period has also undergone significant constitutional reform, moving from an absolute monarchy to becoming a parliamentary democracy in 2008. It coordinates closely with India on foreign policy.

Geographical names policy

Bhutan's official language is Dzongkha, and the script is officially romanized in Bhutan by means of the 'Roman Dzongkha' system (see more below). PCGN policy for names in Bhutan is to use the romanized forms available on official sources, as these apply this official system (this avoids the need to apply the system directly to the original script (see more below), though romanization can be undertaken if romanized forms are not available). The system is published here:

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[1] ISO 639 codes are given for the languages mentioned in this Factfile.
[2] UN data, 2022.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693691/ROMANIZATION_OF_DZONGKHA.pdf

Sources for geographical names

Each district (*dzongkhag*) maintains a website [with the pattern www.*dzongkhagname*.gov.bt] that includes further names information, some including maps and some with lists of subdivisions, e.g. the map of Thimphu is: Dzongkhag Map | Thimphu Dzongkhag Administration (each site is linked in the administrative divisions table, below).

Bhutan's National Spatial Data Infrastructure hosts a geoportal: nsdi.systems.gov.bt

The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) Geographic Names Server can also be used as a source for names in Bhutan.

Language

The sole nationally official language is Dzongkha, written in the Tibetan script[3]. This script is written from left to right and each consonant contains an inherent vowel[4].

English is also widely spoken, and it is notable that English is the primary medium of education; as such the Bhutanese population often reports higher competence and confidence in writing English than Dzongkha. Dzongkha is, however, strongly identified as the national language and is a (spoken) *lingua franca* amongst all linguistic communities.

Information on other languages and demographics of Bhutan is quite difficult to verify, and statistics on language speakers, what constitute languages as opposed to dialects, and ethnic groups differ. It is certain in any case that many languages are spoken: almost all of these are of Tibeto-Burman origin, with the exception of Nepali, which is an Indo-Aryan language. It is of note that although Dzongkha is the national language, it is the mother tongue of only some 27% of the population[5].

Romanization
As Bhutan continued to open in the 1990s, the Dzongkha Development Commission introduced the 'Roman Dzongkha' system in order to allow consistent representation of Dzongkha in 'English'. This system was subsequently published as *Samples for Geographical names of Bhutan in Dzongkha and Romanized Dzongkha with brief guidelines*, and mandated for use in Bhutan in 1997. Previously available at the link below, please contact PCGN for a copy if it is not currently available:
http://www.dzongkha.gov.bt/publications/publication_pdf/Samples%20for%20Geographical%20names%20of%20Bhutan%20in%20Dzongkha%20and%20Romanized%20Dzongkha%20with%20brief%20guidelines..pdf

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[3] It should be noted that the printed script, Uchen, and handwritten script, Ume, differ. The romanization system is applicable only to the printed form.
[4] Such scripts are termed 'abugida', or alphasyllabic. See more on page 3.
[5] Other widely spoken languages include Bumthangkha (7%), Sharchhop (23%) and Nepali (termed Lhotsamkha for the people and language in Bhutan) (43%). [Data drawn from *The Language Web of Bhutan*, 2003].

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PCGN publishes its agreed tabulation of this system here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693691/ROMANIZATION_OF_DZONGKHA.pdf

Romanization is systematic but incorporates elements of pronunciation and includes some ambiguities that mean it is difficult to apply successfully without knowledge of the language. An example of the process of romanization may be seen in the following stages:

པད་མ་དགའ་ཚལ - Pema Gatshel

- Syllables are separated with the marker ་ (word division is not otherwise marked).
- Consonants have an inherent vowel /a/, which can be altered with additional markers and in certain graphic environments e.g. the first syllable is པད - /pa/, with vowel addition /e/.
- The second syllable is མ - /ma/.
- The third is དགའ - /ga/ where both the first and third characters are not romanized.
- The final syllable is ཚལ - /tsha/ with no vowel marker, but for which the vowel becomes /e/ when followed by a syllable final /l/.
- The result is Pema Gatshel (though even knowing the letter-for-letter transliteration, reliance on an official Roman-script source is needed to know this preferred word division).

This complexity demonstrates that use of official Roman-script sources is preferable to applying the romanization system directly.

Additionally, PCGN's research has demonstrated that the system is not implemented in all situations (e.g. road signs or touristic sites may use an anglicised style, rather than romanizations).
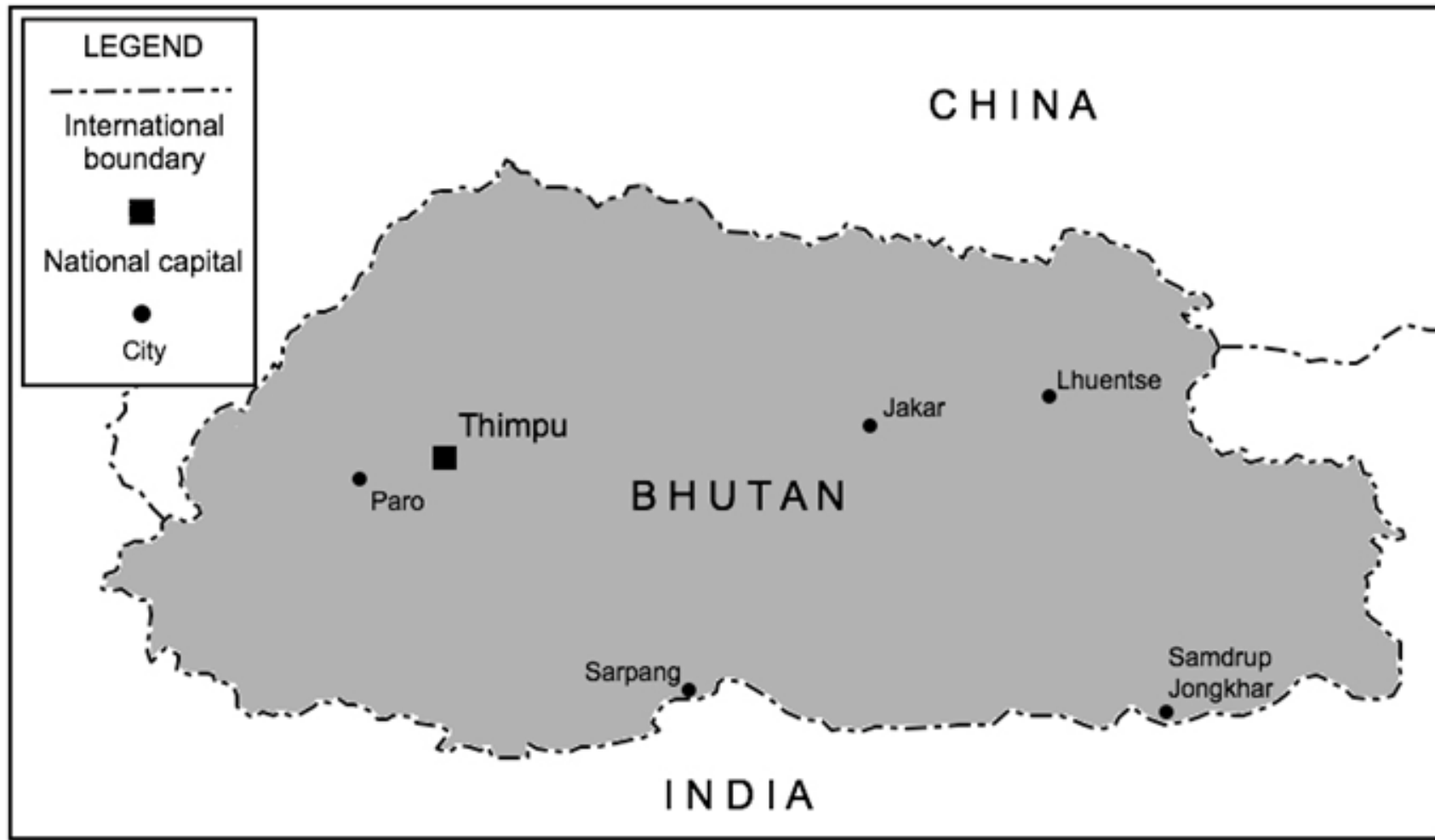
Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings[6]):

The officially used Roman-script form for Dzongkha does not include any diacritical marks or special characters. For guidance on the presentation and use of fonts for the Dzongkha script, please contact PCGN.

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[6] See www.unicode.org

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Map of Bhutan

Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

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Administrative structure

Bhutan is divided into 20 districts (*dzongkhag*) at the first-order administrative level.

ADM1	Dzongkha script	ISO 3166-2	Administrative centre	Centre location	Link to dzongkhag map or administrative detail
Bumthang	བུམ་ཐང	BT-33	Jakar	27°32'57"N 90°45'09"E	Bumthang dzongkhag map
Chhukha	ཆུ་ཁ	BT-12	Tsimasham	27°05'56"N 89°32'10"E	About Chhukha dzongkhag
Dagana	དར་དཀར་ན	BT-22	Daga	27°04'31"N 89°52'37"E	Dagana dzongkhag subdivisions
Gasa	མགར་ས	BT-GA	Gasa	27°54'24"N 89°43'49"E	Gasa dzongkhag map
Haa	ཧཱ	BT-13	Haa	27°22'07"N 89°17'31"E	About Haa dzongkhag
Lhuentse	ལྷུན་རྩེ	BT-44	Lhuentse	27°40'04"N 91°11'02"E	Lhuentse dzongkhag map
Monggar[7]	མོང་སྒར	BT-42	Monggar	27°16'29"N 91°14'23"E	Monggar dzongkhag map
Paro	སྤ་རོ	BT-11	Paro	27°25'50"N 89°24'48"E	About Paro dzongkhag
Pema Gatshel[8]	པད་མ་དགའ་ཚལ	BT-43	Pema Gatshel	27°02'17"N 91°24'11"E	Pema Gatshel dzongkhag map
Punakha	སྤུ་ན་ཁ	BT-23	Punakha	27°35'01"N 89°51'43"E	Punakha dzongkhag map
Samdrup Jongkhar	བསམ་གྲུབ་ལྗོངས་མཁར	BT-45	Samdrup Jongkhar	26°48'02"N 91°30'19"E	Samdrup Jongkhar dzongkhag map
Samtse	བསམ་རྩེ	BT-14	Samtse	26°53'57"N 89°05'58"E	Samtse dzongkhag map
Sarpang	གསར་སྤང	BT-31	Sarpang	26°51'50"N 90°16'03"E	Sarpang dzongkhag map
Thimphu	ཐིམ་ཕུ	BT-15	Thimphu	27°28'26"N 89°38'07"E	Thimphu Dzongkhag Map
Trashigang	བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྒང	BT-41	Trashigang	27°19'59"N 91°33'15"E	Trashigang dzongkhag subdivisions
Trashi Yangtse	བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་རྩེ	BT-TY	Trashi Yangtse	27°36'42"N 91°29'53"E	Trashi Yangtse dzongkhag map
Trongsa	ཀྲོང་གསར	BT-32	Trongsa	27°30'09"N 90°30'26"E	Trongsa dzongkhag map
Tsirang	རྩི་རང	BT-21	Tsirang	27°01'19"N 90°07'22"E	Tsirang dzongkhag subdivisions
Wangdue Phodrang	དབང་འདུས་ཕོ་བྲང	BT-24	Wangdue Phodrang	27°29'10"N 89°53'57"E	Wangdue Phodrang dzongkhag map

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[7] Sometimes seen with single 'g', Mongar, but PCGN recommends the double 'g' form (the romanization of the two syllables being /mong/ and /gar/).

[8] Sometimes seen as one word, but the two-word form was used in the Dzongkhag website: http://www.pemagatshel.gov.bt/node/1 (though this is not currently available).

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ADM1	Dzongkha script	ISO 3166-2	Administrative centre	Centre location	Link to dzongkhag map or administrative detail
Zhemgang	གཞལམས་སྒང	BT-34	Zhemgang	27°13'01"N 90°39'29"E	[Zhemgang dzongkhag map](#)

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Other significant locations

PCGN Approved name[9]	Other names	Feature Type	Location
Duars Plain		Plain (Bhutan; India)	26°45'00"N 89°45'00"E
Gangkar Punsum[10]		Mountain (Bhutan's high point: 7570m[11])	28°02'54"N 89°48'00"E
Himalayas	Himālaya (Nepal, India) Ximalaya (China) Himaliya (Pakistan)	Mountains – strictly the Himalayas are composed of distinct ranges: Greater Himalayas and Lesser Himalayas. The 'group' name Himalayas in English is typically used to cover both ranges.	28°00'00"N 84°00'00"E
Mo Chhu		River	27°34'42"N 89°52'00"E Confluence with Pho Chhu to form Sankosh at Punakha. [12]
Pho Chhu		River	27°34'42"N 89°52'00"E
Sankosh	Puna Tseng Chhu (Bhutan)	River (Bhutan, India)	25°58'14"N 89°50'20"E

Disputed areas

Bhutan and China do not have formal diplomatic relations and there are a number of disputed sections along the almost 500km of shared boundary. There is no treaty describing the boundary, and there are formerly annual, now infrequent, negotiations on establishing a common alignment.

Recent tensions have been provoked by China's road building programme, particularly in the Doklam plateau near the Bhutan, India, China western tripoint. For further detail, and guidance on appropriate boundary depiction, please contact PCGN.

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[9] PCGN recommends use of conventional names for international features where they exist. If there is no conventional name, then the relevant name can be shown on the appropriate side of the international boundary on cartographic products.

[10] Variant spellings often seen (e.g. Gangkhar Puensum) but Gangkar Punsum is the romanization of the Dzongkha script.

[11] Also the world's highest unclimbed mountain. Since 2003 Bhutan has forbidden all mountaineering.

[12] There are many river valleys flowing from sources in the Himalayas and most eventually emptying into the Brahmaputra. This confluence is a particularly regarded feature, known for its beauty and adventure tourism.

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Useful references

- BBC country profile (no longer updated): https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12480707
- Bhutan's official guidelines for romanization: http://www.dzongkha.gov.bt/publications/publication_pdf/Samples%20for%20Geographical%20names%20of%20Bhutan%20in%20Dzongkha%20and%20Romanized%20Dzongkha%20with%20brief%20guidelines..pdf
- CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/bhutan/
- FCDO Geographical Names & Information: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): https://www.iso.org/obp/ui
- PCGN Country Names list: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names
- PCGN Romanization system for Dzongkha: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693691/ROMANIZATION_OF_DZONGKHA.pdf
- *The Language Web of Bhutan*, 2003, Singye Namgyel, ISBN 99936-10-37-7
- Unicode www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names Geographic Names Server: GNS Search & Download WebApp (nga.mil)

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