**Bhutan**

**Location**

This country (27°30′N, 90°30′E) is located in southern Asia between India and China. The location of this country was also one of the reasons that they had so many dealings with Britain since the British India Company was located in India. If you were to compare the size to a state in the US, the country is only half the size of Indiana. The country is a landlocked country with no coastline. The capital of the country is Thimphu.

**Geography**

As mentioned before, this is a landlocked country. It is a very mountainous country and the positive thing about it is that most of its land is fertile. The lowest part of the country is Drangme Chhu at 97m and the highest point of the country is Kula Kangri at 7553m. Some of their natural resources include timber, hydropower, gypsum and calcium carbonate. Irrigation is also a technique that is used in this country.

**Climate**

Depending on where you are located, the climate could vary a little. If you are in the south, the weather is pretty similar to the tropics. You will get cool winters with hot summers. And if you are close to the Himalayans, the winters are really cold and summers are cool. Also, being close to the Himalayans there will be more violent storms and landslides.

**History**

Bhutan has a history of British influence. It was the British who helped the country create their monarchy in 1907. After becoming a monarchy, the country wanted to have more say in policies so after 3 years a treaty was signed between Britain and Bhutan giving them power to deal with their own affairs. They have had some rough dealings in the past with Britain such as when they attacked Cooch Behari, who appealed to Britain for help. This lead to the Duar War, which lasted from 1864-1865. Most of the conflicts involved border problems. The country was headed by the Wangchuck family and is now slowly evolving into a democracy. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal is considered the founder of the country since he created a national identity by using customs and ideas. There have been a good amount of civil wars in the country as well when there was a struggle for power between 2 clans, Paro and Trongsa. In 1931, Shabdrung ended his own dynasty and was later assassinated due to this reason. What is surprising is that kings after that did not want that much power and were willing to hand it over to the National Assembly. In 1971, the country was recognized by the United Nations as a country.

**Important Dates**

December 17, 1907 is considered National Day because that is the day that the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck, ascended the throne. January 9 is Traditional Day of Offering, February 8 is Losar, February 21-23 is Fifth Druk Gyalpo Anniversary, March 24 is General Elections Public Holiday, April 15 is Zabdrung Kuchoe, May 2 is Third Gyalpo Anniversary, May 19 is Lord Buddha’s Perinirvana, July 12 is Birth Anniversary of Guru Rinpoche, July 18 is Signing of Constitution, August 5 is Sermon of Buddha, October 9 is Dashaim, November 11 is Birth Anniversary of Fourth Druk Gyalpo, November 19 is Descending Day of Lord Buddha, and December 17 is National Day.

**Population**
As of July 2008, the current population of Bhutan is around 682,321. The population growth rate is about 1.301%. Women usually give birth to around 2 children and the sex ratio is quite equal. People live to be in their late sixties and there are about 100 people in the country with AIDS. One would describe the people as Bhutanese and there are ethnic groups that include the Bhote and Nepalese that also reside in the country.

Currency
The currency for the country is known as the ngultrum (BTN). One US dollar is worth 42.28000 Bhutan Ngultrum and 1 Bhutan Ngultrum (BTN) = 0.02365 US Dollar (USD).

Education
The First Development Plan in 1961 to 1966 helped to develop more schools for the country. There have been cases in the past where schools had to be closed down in poor areas because of a low attendance rate. The education system is very western in style (again from the British influence) and secondary education had to be obtained somewhere else, such as India. English is considered a very important subject that is taught in school along with most of the traditional subjects such as math and science. Learning Dzongkha was also important since it is considered the official language of the country. Many students like to travel outside the country for higher education from nearby countries such as Singapore, Japan and Australia. The literacy rate in the country is still low considering how only less than 50% of the population could read and write. The same trend is noticeable that more males are literate than females.

Language
The official language of the country is Dzongkha and there are other dialects as well. The Tibetan dialect is used by the Bhotes and Nepalese use their own dialect. The literate portion of the population would also be able to speak English.

Religion
Considering the many holidays that the country celebrates include Buddha, it is no surprise that the official religion of the country is Buddhism. More specifically it is Mahayana Buddhism. Part of the reason why it is so popular is because the government supports it as well. They give financially to the monasteries so that they are able to support the teachings of Buddha and find more books that are related to those teachings. Many monasteries can be found throughout the country. And if you were to notice, they tend to use a lot of symbols and statues to make sure the common people are exposed to it. Monks also do missionary work to ensure more people are exposed to it.

Agriculture
Agriculture in Bhutan did experience some difficulty at first because of the arable land. Approximately 60% of the country is in the agricultural sector. People did not have enough knowledge of farming techniques to help them sustain. This also caused a lack of meat production because they did not know how to feed the animals well to get good quality of meat. Many products were imported to ensure that they people had enough to eat. Cardamom, apples and oranges were produced to assist the economy, but because of the poor knowledge of farming techniques, not enough was produced to make a profit. The First Model Development Plan (which was also used to improve the education system) also helped to educate farmers on techniques of raising livestock and growing produce. Since then, there has been some improvement on the country’s agricultural sector.
Trade

With India as one of its neighbors, there has been frequent trading between these 2 countries. Items they import from India are much needed to sustain the country. The economy of this country is actually quite weak compared to their neighboring countries. They still have to improve on a lot of their farming techniques before they could produce enough products to trade with other countries. India has been a great help because they have been coming up with educational programs to help support their agriculture and also some Indians have crossed the border to help with the renovations.

Food

Bhutanese cooking may be simple but actually it is very delicious. They enjoy Tibetan dishes as well. They like to use chili in their cooking and the time to prepare the meal is very fast since they use methods such as boiling and frying in oil. Like other Asian countries, they also prefer rice with their meals, especially red rice. Since India is one of its trading partners, they get their meats and fishes from them. Vegetables are also a major part of their diet along with cheese (yak cheese is one of their favorite). A popular beverage to drink is tea.

Landmarks

When traveling to Bhutan, one must visit the capital city of Thimbu because it has a lot to offer. Attractions include Tashichhodzong is the seat of government and the site where the 5-day Tshechu festival is held every year. It is a beautiful fortress with a pink roof. If you want to visit where the royal family lives, Dechencholing is not that far from Tashichhodzong and it contains a beautiful lawn along with the magnificent residence. The interesting fact is that the king does not live there with his family. He has a separate residence of his own. For those on the religious side, if you like to visit a monastery, Tangu Cherry is the choice. Not only is it beautiful, but it is also a historical site. There are lots of markets you could visit and they sell items such as the Buddhist spinning wheel. It is also known that the country does not have traffic lights because there are not that many cars around.