

REGENERATIVE BHUTAN FORUM

Pathways to Regenerative Tourism



August 18TH - 20ST, 2025
Dungkar Dzong, Paro, Bhutan



DEPARTMENT
OF TOURISM
of Bhutan



switchasia
REGIONAL POLICY ADVISORY



BHUTAN
Believe



asr



INTRODUCTION

The SUSTOUR Bhutan, an European Union funded project under the Switch Asia Programme implemented by the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO) in partnership with Hotel and Restaurant Association of Bhutan (HRAB) and Allianz Selbständiger Reiseunternehmen- Bundesverband e.V in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment (MoICE) is organizing a Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Tourism Networking Conference - scheduled to take place on the 18th, 19th and 20th August 2025. The three day event will be structured as follows –

Day 1

Main conference session with keynote speakers

Day 2

Workshop and training sessions

Day 3

Site visit to the selected tourism products

The conference will be hosted at Dungkar Dzong located in Paro.

THE EVENT WILL FOCUS ON FOUR CENTRAL THEMES:

01

Carbon footprint measurement in tourism.

Development & adoption of national standards for Green Hotels & Tour Operators.

02

03

Strengthening sustainable supply chains from local producers to hotels and tour operators.

Integrating sustainability into branding and marketing strategies.

04



WHAT IS SUSTOUR?

The SUSTOUR project, funded by the European Union under the Switch Asia Programme, aims to adapt and replicate successful Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) practices from the EU tourism industry into a Bhutanese context. Bhutan has prioritized sustainability in tourism as a core element of its Vision 2030, the country's long-term national development strategy. However, sustainability awareness and implementation among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the travel sector remain limited. Although sustainability standards are in place, they are seldom applied due to a lack of market-driven incentives.

At the same time, international B2B and B2C markets are increasingly demanding sustainable tourism options, presenting new opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth in Bhutan. To support Bhutanese tourism MSMEs in seizing these opportunities, the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO), in collaboration with the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Bhutan (HRAB) and ASR, has launched this initiative. The project is designed through a participatory approach, leveraging the partners' combined expertise in sustainable tourism, the local business environment, and policy frameworks to address existing challenges and foster the development of green supply chains across the tourism sector.

The project's overarching goal is to accelerate Bhutan's transition toward a green economy by enhancing the sustainability and competitiveness of tourism—an essential sector for the country. This contributes directly to the goals of Vision 2030 and aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8 and 12 by promoting SCP practices within tourism supply chains. The specific objective is to replicate and embed proven SCP approaches into Bhutan's tourism sector as standard business practices. This will result in greener tourism products, stronger integration of local MSMEs and communities, and supportive government policies that create a competitive advantage in the global tourism market.

ABOUT – OUR APPROACH TO TOURISM



Guided by the Bhutan Integrated Tourism Master Plan, Bhutan adopts a regenerative and high-value tourism model that goes beyond sustainability to actively restore, protect, and enhance its cultural, environmental, and social heritage. The approach is built on four strategic pillars and emphasizes inclusive, regionally balanced, and economically impactful tourism development.

CORE ELEMENTS OF BHUTAN'S TOURISM APPROACH

1. High Value, Low Volume (High Impact)
 - Reinforces Bhutan's long-standing tourism policy to limit volume while maximizing value per visitor.
 - Focuses on attracting mindful travelers who contribute meaningfully to Bhutan's economy and conservation efforts.
2. Regenerative Tourism
 - Moves beyond minimizing harm to actively contributing to the revitalization of nature, culture, and communities.
 - Encourages tourism that leaves destinations better than before, aligning with Bhutan's Gross National Happiness philosophy.
3. Public-Private-People Partnership (PPPP)
 - Promotes collaboration between government, private sector, communities, and civil society in shaping tourism policies and implementation.
 - Supports decentralization of decision-making to empower local stakeholders.
4. Geographic and Seasonal Diversification
 - Aims to distribute tourism benefits across all regions—not just traditional western hubs—by promoting eastern, central, and southern circuits.
 - Encourages year-round tourism through diverse offerings (nature, wellness, festivals, trekking, MICE, etc.).
5. Sustainable Supply Chain and Infrastructure
 - Enhances tourism facilities, digital infrastructure, and transportation while ensuring minimal ecological footprint.
 - Promotes green building standards and responsible waste and resource management.



6. Inclusive Growth and Local Empowerment

- Integrates local MSMEs, artisans, and rural communities into the tourism value chain.
- Prioritizes skill development, entrepreneurship, and youth employment in the sector.

7. Strong Governance and Quality Assurance

- Implements clear governance frameworks, certification systems, and monitoring to maintain high service and sustainability standards.
- Supports data-driven planning and transparent management.

Namgyal Dorji Hon'ble Lyonpo



"Bhutan has long stood as a beacon of sustainability guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. The Regenerative Bhutan Forum is a vital step in translating this vision into practice. By embedding regenerative values into the tourism sector, we are building a future where socio-economic growth, cultural integrity, and environmental stewardship go hand in hand."





WHY JOIN US IN BHUTAN?

Bhutan is considered one of the greenest countries in the world, where tourism is a significant source of foreign income and a key economic driver. Tourism can be a positive driving force, contributing to a circular thriving economy, strengthening community well-being, and supporting cultural and natural heritage. Bhutan's integrated tourism plan goals are to actively improve environmental and cultural assets, empower local communities as tourism leaders; create deeper connections between visitors and places; and transform tourism from a community impact to a community-led initiative.

A central theme of the conference is the operationalization of GNH within the tourism value chain. By recognising that economic and social transformation must be both systemic and situated, this conference will propose models, policy strategies, and enabling infrastructures that can be adapted to local contexts, while informing national and international development agendas.

At the heart of developing Regenerative Tourism are practical steps built on experience and insight. Please join us as we share how tourism is successfully re-establishing itself in Bhutan by making the country even greener.

WHAT THE CONFERENCE AIMS TO ACHIEVE?

The Regenerative Bhutan Forum explores pathways to rebuild tourism on regenerative principles. Our aim is to share our insights and hopefully inspire regional communication, share wisdom and work together towards a regenerative future. Our conference program is based on 4 key elements:

BASED ON BHUTAN'S HOLISTIC VISION

Bhutan recently developed an integrated tourism development plan in which it envisions a regenerative, high-value tourism that bolsters Bhutan's economic prosperity, safeguards its cultural heritage, and protects its natural environment. Bhutan's approach, rooted in the national ethos of Gross National Happiness, has enabled the country to showcase its spiritual, cultural, and natural heritage while fostering meaningful exchanges between visitors and Bhutan's residents. This unique appeal is further strengthened by Bhutan's stable political climate and governance model, which ensures tourism development aligns with the country's focus on environmental stewardship, social well-being and a thriving circular economy.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Anna Pollock

Anna Pollock, who received a standing ovation at the International Tourism Fair in Berlin, is a visionary in regenerative tourism. With decades of experience as a strategist and changemaker, she has helped destinations thrive socially, culturally, and ecologically. From pioneering wellness travel in the 1970s to championing climate transparency, Anna has always been ahead of the curve.

Today, she leads the global shift from extractive tourism to travel that gives back more than it takes. In Bhutan where Gross National Happiness and strong national standards align her mission resonates deeply. Whether you're a mindful traveler, ESG-driven MICE planner, or tourism innovator, join us in shaping a purpose-driven future for travel.

INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS



SONIA TERUEL

Sonia Teruel is a consultant in regenerative tourism design with a strong track record in driving sustainable transformation.

As an educator, facilitator, and strategist, she is committed to reimagining tourism by placing life and nature at the centre. Sonia supports communities, organizations, and destinations in reconnecting with their essence, aligning with natural rhythms, and regenerating the systems they depend on.

Known for her holistic approach and team leadership, Sonia is passionate about fostering conscious travel and creating transformative, purpose-led tourism experiences.

Dr John Hummel

John has over 30 years of experience in regenerative tourism, rural development, and inclusive value chains in mountain regions. He has led projects across the Himalaya focused on sustainable livelihoods, climate resilience, and poverty reduction, working with governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

He spent 15 years with SNV and coordinated 50+ projects for UNWTO's ST-EP programme. Recently, he has led consultancy teams in Asia and Africa, supporting tourism planning, conservation, and recovery efforts in Nepal and Bhutan.

John co-founded Okharbot Organic Farm near Kathmandu and teaches mountain landscape courses. He holds a PhD based on his development work.



INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS



Mr. Nipatpong Chuanchuen

Mr. Nipatpong Chuanchuen, or Khun Tarr, is a Thai ecotourism pioneer and innovator in low-carbon and regenerative tourism. He develops practical tools to help SMEs and communities understand climate change and reduce their carbon footprints.

Founder of TrekkingThai.Com, he inspired a new wave of Thai nature travelers and has held senior roles in the Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association and ASEAN Ecotourism Network for over 20 years.

Since 2021, Khun Tarr has led efforts to support climate-smart tourism, including helping the Bang Rong community in Phuket measure emissions and redesign experiences to decarbonize.

Robin Boustead

Changemaker in tourism, blending a deep love for nature with decades of experience as an entrepreneur and sustainability/ESG consultant. His diverse achievements range from building a multi-million-dollar adventure travel brand to designing sustainable projects in Nepal and Bhutan, coaching over 170 businesses in sustainability certification, and creating the world's highest trekking route the Great Himalaya Trail.

Now based in Southern Germany with his family and three rescue dogs, Robin is also an accomplished writer, with works including the ESG Reporting Manual, Great Himalaya Trail Guidebook, and maps of Nepal and Bhutan.



NATIONAL SPEAKERS



Tashi Wangmo

Ms. Tashi Wangmo is the Secretary of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment, Royal Government of Bhutan, since January 2023. She previously served as Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources and was an Eminent Member of the National Council for over 13 years, appointed by His Majesty The King. During her tenure, she chaired key parliamentary committees on social affairs and governance.

Tashi began her career as an engineer and held several leadership roles in Bhutan's civil service. She was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2010. She holds a Master's in Public Policy from GRIPS, Japan, and a Bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Wollongong, Australia.

Mr. Damcho Rinzin

Mr. Damcho Rinzin is the Director of the Department of Tourism, leading Bhutan's National Tourism Organization. He began his career in the former Department of Tourism and holds a Bachelor's in Hospitality and Tourism (Canada) and a double Master's in Tourism and International Business (Australia).

A passionate advocate of Bhutan's "High Value, Low Volume" tourism vision, he is committed to promoting regenerative tourism that benefits both people and the planet.

Driven by purpose, Mr. Damcho finds his work deeply meaningful and feels honored to lead an industry vital to Bhutan's development and aligned with his values of responsible, conscious travel.



NATIONAL SPEAKERS



Mr. Sonam Dorji

Mr. Sonam Dorji, Executive Director of the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO), has over 20 years of experience in Bhutan's tourism industry. He also chairs the Tourism Advisory Committee and has led key initiatives, including Bhutan's first community-based tourism programs, the online tourist visa system, and EU-funded "Low Carbon" tourism projects.

His leadership has made ABTO a vital partner to the government. He previously chaired the Civil Society Organization Authority and Bhutan's Country Coordination Mechanism for The Global Fund.

Mr. Dorji is a recipient of the 2002 PATA "Face of the Future" Award and the Coronation Silver Medal.

Dorji

Dorji is the founder and CEO of Happiness Farm in Paro and Punakha, where he integrates sustainable farming with eco-tourism to promote cultural heritage, rural livelihoods, and environmental conservation. With 24 years of tourism experience, he fosters community engagement and leads partnerships for sustainable development.

He served as Programme Officer at BTFEC, managing Bhutan's Adaptation Fund and GEF portfolios. Dorji also contributed to the Human Well-Being & Happiness Assessment 2022 and coordinated the Guinness-recognized "World's Largest Book" project.

He holds an MBA in Project Management from ANU and a BA in Geography from Sherubtse College.



NATIONAL SPEAKERS



Tshering Choden

Tshering Choden is a social entrepreneur and cultural preservationist dedicated to regenerative futures rooted in Bhutanese heritage. As the third-generation founder of AmA by Deki Natural Dyes, she revives ancestral dyeing techniques into sustainable fashion while supporting children who've lost a parent.

She is Vice Chairperson of Bhutan Textiles and founder of the Institute of Bhutanese Arts and Management (I-AM), nurturing young artisans and mindful entrepreneurs.

An alumna of the U.S. Community Solutions Program, Tshering's work has earned the National Energy Globe Award 2022. Her mission bridges tradition with innovation to uplift communities, ecosystems, and culture.

Chorten Dorji

Chorten Dorji has served as Executive Director of the Handicrafts Association of Bhutan (HAB) since 2011, leading national and international projects on product innovation, value chains, and market access for artisans. With over 21 years of experience in traditional arts, vocational training, and sustainable livelihoods, he holds a degree in social work, a PG Diploma in Vocational Training, and multiple professional certifications.

Chorten has led donor-funded initiatives (EU, ADB, DANIDA) supporting rural entrepreneurship and women's livelihoods. He currently chairs the Technical Committee of BSB and is Vice Chair of BCCI's Sector Associations Committee, playing a key role in Bhutan's creative economy and policy development.



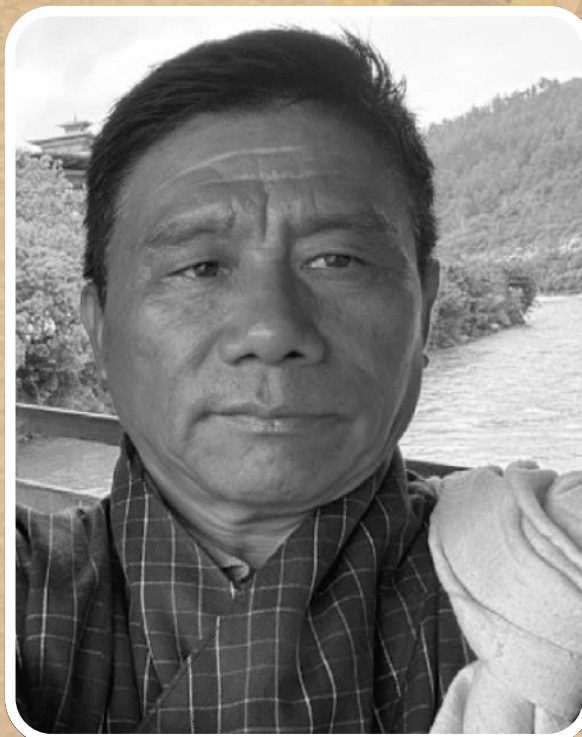
NATIONAL SPEAKERS



Tandin Sangay Wangchuk

Tandin Sangay Wangchuk, a former guide, writer, tour operator, and hotelier, is now a passionate farmer and hospitality advisor at Dhumra Farm Resort in Punakha. With a degree from Sherubtse College, he was Bhutan's first university graduate to become a tour guide and later a partner at Etho Metho Tours.

At Dhumra, he promotes mindful, sustainable tourism and farming through permaculture, blending tradition with innovation. His life at the farm is his purpose—his ikigai. A storyteller and advocate for youth engagement in agriculture, Sangay continues to inspire through farm tours and hikes, living as a spiritual ecologist and mindful entrepreneur.



INITIATIVES WE WILL EXPLORE



The SUSTOUR Bhutan project contributed to this sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism development supporting its transformation towards a thriving circular economy by enhancing tourism as a key sector.

- At national level, the project supported an enabling environment to improve Bhutan's regenerative policies, by supporting the development and implementation of Green Hotel and Tour Operator Standards, training courses and tools.
- At district level, the SUSTOUR project supported the development of sustainable inclusive and resilient destinations through 16 low-carbon tourism products, like the Taktsang monastery area in Paro and the areas around the Dzongs in Thimphu, Paro and Punakha, the Cheri and Tango monasteries and the Paro airport.
- At entrepreneur level, 100 hotels have been trained to go green, around 200 of their suppliers have been trained as well. Besides the hotels, almost 100 tour operators are trained to become greener.

**DAY
1**

Conference – Pathways to regenerative tourism



Opening Ceremony

This ceremonial session will mark the formal opening of the forum, featuring traditional blessings, official addresses, and keynote remarks to establish the thematic context of regenerative tourism in Bhutan and beyond.

Time	Activity & Description
08:30 – 09:00	Reception of the Chief Guest. Welcoming and seating of the Chief Guest and dignitaries.
09:00 – 09:45	Marchang Ceremony. Traditional Bhutanese purification and offering ceremony to inaugurate the event.
09:45 – 10:00	Welcome Address by Organizer. Opening remarks and event overview by the co-host organization (DoT).
10:00 – 10:20	Keynote Address by Chief Guest. High-level address on the importance of the Regenerative Bhutan Forum and Sustainable Tourism in Bhutan.
10:00 – 10:25	Remarks by Resident Representative, UNDP
10:25 – 10:55	Address by Anna Pollock. Framing regenerative tourism within global sustainable development.
10:55 – 11:00	Launching of Green Hotel Standard.
11:00 – 11:05	Vote of Thanks. Appreciation remarks acknowledging dignitaries and participants + brief program run-through. (Ms. Kezang, DoT).
11:05 – 11:30	Morning Tea Break. Photo opportunity with light refreshments.

Main Program – Plenary Session (Morning).

Theme: Global and National Perspectives on Regenerative Tourism.

This session explores the broader conceptual, policy, and strategic frameworks of regenerative tourism through international and national lenses.

Time	Activity & Description
11:30 – 11:35	Opening Remarks. Brief introduction and framing of the session by the organizer. (ABTO).
11:35 – 12:05	Keynote Address: International Perspective. Anna Pollock presents leading-edge global insights on regenerative tourism in relation to Bhutan and South Asia.
12:05 – 12:35	Keynote Address: Bhutan's Vision. Director, Department of Tourism.
12:35 – 13:00	Interactive Q&A. Open floor for discussion with keynote speakers.

Time	Activity & Description
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch Break. Buffet lunch and informal networking.

Main Program – Thematic Panels (Afternoon)

Each panel features insights from national and international experts, followed by audience engagement.

Panel 1: Carbon Calculation.

Moderator & Lead Speaker: Mr. Robin Boustead

This session will explore carbon footprint measurement methodologies, and implementation strategies in tourism operations.

Time	Activity & Description.
14:00 – 14:05	Opening Remarks and introduction by Moderator, Mr Robin Boustead.
14:05 – 14:10	Introduction by Mr. Chimi Dorji, Environment Officer, Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC).
14:10 – 14:20	Introduction by Mr.Sonam Wangdi, Chief Forestry Officer, Nature Conservation Division (NCD).
14:20 – 14:25	Introduction by Mr. Nipatpong Chuanchuen, Thai Ecotourism Specialist.
14:25 – 14:45	Panel Discussion and Audience Q&A.

Panel 2: Green Tourism Standards

Moderator: Mr. Sonam Dorji, Project Director SUSTOUR Bhutan and Mr. Rinchen Tshering National BIOFIN Coordinator - this panel focuses on the development, adoption, and enforcement of sustainable tourism standards, including certification, compliance, and best practices.

Time	Activity & Description
14:45 – 15:00	Keynote remarks and introduction by Moderator Mr. Sonam Dorji.
15:00 – 15:05	Introduction by Mr. Rinzin Jamtsho, Chief Tourism Officer, Department of Tourism, Bhutan.
15:05 – 15:10	Introduction by Mr. Karma Tshetrim, Chief of Standardisation, Bhutan Standard Bureau.
15:10 – 15:15	Introduction by Mr. Masaru Takayama, Founding Chair, Asian Ecotourism Network.
15:15 – 15:30	Panel Discussion and Audience Q&A.

15:30 – 16:00 | Afternoon Tea Break

Panel 3: Greener Supply Chains.

Lead Speaker and Moderator: Dr. John Hummel

This session delves into sustainable procurement, responsible sourcing, and circular economy principles in tourism supply chains.

Time	Activity & Description
16:00 – 16:10	Keynote remarks and introduction by Dr. John Hummel.
16:10 – 16:15	Introduction by Mr. Tandin Sangay Wangchuk, Dumra Farm Resort.
16:15 – 16:20	Introduction by Ms. Tshering Choden, AmA.
16:20 – 16:25	Introduction by Ms. Anu Lama, ICIMOD Tourism Specialist .
16:25 – 16:30	Introduction by Ms. Sonia Teruel, Founder/ Director, The RegenLab for Travel, UK/ Spain.
16:30 – 16:45	Panel Discussion and Audience Q&A.

Panel 4: Green Branding and Marketing

Moderator: Mr.Phuntsho Gyeltshen, Chief MPD, DoT

This panel explores how destinations can effectively position themselves through green branding, storytelling, and ethical marketing approaches.

Time	Activity & Description
16:45 – 17:00	Keynote Remarks by Moderator - Mr. Phuntsho Gyeltshen, Chief Tourism Officer, Department of Tourism, Bhutan.
17:00 – 17:05	Introduction by Mr. Damcho Rinzin, Director, Department of Tourism, Bhutan.
17:05 – 17:10	Introduction by Mr. Deepak Raj Joshi, Nepal Tourism Board.
17:10 – 17:15	Introduction by Mr. Manoj Kumar Matta, Indian Association of Tour Operators.
17:15 – 17:20	Introduction Mr. Kumar Mani Thapaliya, Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents.
17:20 – 17:35	Panel Discussion and Audience Q&A.

Wrap-Up & Reflections

Time	Activity & Description
17:35 – 17:40	Digital Evaluation of Day 1. Participants complete a mobile-based feedback form.
17:40 – 17:45	Session Summary & Introduction to Day 2. The moderator presents key takeaways and outlook. (Kezang DoT).
17:45 – 18:00	Vote of Thanks. Closing appreciation by the organizing team. (Ms. Thuji, SUSTOUR Bhutan).

Evening Program

Time	Activity & Description
19:00 onwards	Gala Dinner. Hosted dinner with cultural performances and networking opportunities. Signing ceremony with regional tourism associations with ABTO Certificate awarding for Hotels assessed for compliance with Bhutan Green Hotel Standards.

DAY 2

Four quarter day workshops/training courses on Circular Thriving Economy (carbon calculations & national green standards), Community Well-Being (greener supply chains?) & Purposeful Communication (Green Branding & Marketing)



Objectives

1. Train and interact regarding the proposed themes of the three-days conference: Highlighting good practices (carbon calculations and national green standards), greening supply chains and empowering guests (green communication and branding)
2. Compare theme results with initiatives in the region; Interactive sharing of theme results with participants of the region

Five parallel sessions:

1. Nature and Culture Conservation
2. Carbon Calculation
3. Green Tourism Standards
4. Greener Supply Chains
5. Green Branding and Marketing

Participants can participate in any of the above sessions on a rotation basis.

Time	Theme	Moderator	Hall/Room
9:30 – 11:00	Nature and Culture Conservation.	Ms. Sonia & Ms. Anna.	1
	Carbon Calculation.	Mr. Robin & Mr. Nipatpong Chuanchuen.	2
	Green Tourism Standards.	Mr. Sonam & Mr. Rinzin.	3
11:00 – 11:30	Tea Break		
11:30 – 13:30	Nature and Culture Conservation.	Ms. Sonia and Ms. Anna.	1
	Greener Supply Chain.	Dr. John & Mr. Chorten.	2
	Green Branding & Marketing.	Mr. Guido & Mr. Phuntsho.	3
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch		
14:00 – 15:30	Carbon Calculation.	Mr. Robin and Mr. Nipatpong Chuanchuen.	2
	Greener Supply Chain.	Dr. John & Mr. Chorten.	3

15:30 – 16:00	Tea Break		
16:00 – 17:30	Green Tourism Standards.	Mr.Sonam & Mr. Rinzin.	2
	Green Branding & Marketing.	Mr. Guido & Mr. Phuntsho.	3

Evening Program.

Time	Activity & Description.
19:00 onwards	Network Dinner. Hosted dinner with networking opportunities.

**DAY
3**

DAY 3. Field visits to permanent products in Paro



Field visits based on the selected themes for the three-day conference:

- Carbon calculation (Taktsang) - a hike up to Bhutan's iconic Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) highlights the importance of integrating various carbon management topics to create genuine Low Carbon tourism products. Topics include human and horse powered activities, local supply chains and building materials, and waste management.
- Greening of supply chains from Hotels and Tour Operators to local suppliers (Happiness Farm) - www.thehappinessfarm.com
- National standards for Green Hotels and Tour Operators and Greening of branding and marketing (Zhiwaling Heritage Hotel, Rinpung Dzong and Ta Dzong - Museum)

ENERGY BENCHMARKING INDICATORS FOR BHUTAN TOURISM SECTOR, 2012



Category	Carbon* Benchmarking Indicators Typical Value [50 th percentile]	Unit	Sample Size, N	Total entities in Bhutan, 2012	Sampled (%)
Non-rated Hotels	1.92	Kg CO ₂ eq/Guest Night	36	Master list not available	-
1 & 2 Star Hotels	2.57	Kg CO ₂ eq/Guest Night	13 (1 Star = 2 & 2 Star = 11)	61 [Source TCB, 2012]	21%
3 Star Hotels	3.17	Kg CO ₂ eq/Guest Night	34	45 [Source TCB, 2012]	76%
Hotels for International Tourists	4 Star Hotels	1.55	Kg CO ₂ eq/Guest Night	8 [Source TCB, 2012]	100%
	5 Star Hotels	29.3	Kg CO ₂ eq/Guest Night	9 [Source TCB, 2012]	89%
	Restaurants	1.29	Kg CO ₂ eq/Cover	52 [Source HRAB, 2012]	73%
Tour Operators	265	Kg CO ₂ eq/ Customer/Day	66	318 [Source TCB, 2012]	21%
Handicrafts & Artisans	0.003	Kg CO ₂ eq/ Employee/Month	48	280 [source HAB, 2012]	17%
Tourist Shops/Suppliers	104	Kg CO ₂ eq/ Employee/Month	36	Master list not available	-

*includes Scope 1 & Scope 2 GHG emissions & calculated taking average for both tourism high season & low season.

Source: baseline survey report, Megaskills research, ABTO, HRAB and GAB

Note: 'national' benchmarks' established for Bhutan should not be considered as 'static' or 'fixed' in nature because benchmarking is a 'continuous' process requiring continuous monitoring and revision of targets/goals.

A key finding was the very low emissions associated with the handicraft sector, which also had strong social benefits. Promotion of the handicraft sector had always been an important Government policy, but now it took on extra measure through initiatives like Voluntary Artists' Studio of Bhutan (VAST) and Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Crafts (APIC) – 75 indigenous handicraft shops, which are all locale sourced.

Emissions from hotels appeared inconsistent, which was probably due to the small data set and severe limitations in data collection/consistency. However, carbon management was on the agenda for the Bhutanese tourism sector.

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT BECAME KEY, 2015-18



Tourism continued to grow and by 2015 international visitor arrivals had reached 155,000. Along with a rapidly expanding tourism sector came large investments in hotels and tourism infrastructure. ABTO realised that how the locations and activities tourists were coming to experience were managed was a possible way to both promote Bhutan as a green destination and reduce emissions.

So, ABTO established a range of assessment criteria, including carbon emissions, that would form the basis of Low Carbon Tours development. These nine criteria focused on the types of tourism product components that could create positive social and environmental impacts, as well as reduce carbon emissions:

1. Low Carbon Activities e.g. horse riding, homestays with local communities etc.
2. Low Carbon Accommodation e.g. homestays & guesthouses (licensed by TCB). Tourist accommodation in Bhutan has a smaller carbon footprint than most other destinations because more than 99.9% of the national grid electricity is generated from hydropower (a renewable form of energy) and less than 0.1% from fossil fuels.
3. Local Cuisine & Produce (e.g. vegetables, fruit). Local means less fuel is used to transport products hence less GHG emissions. Also, helps local communities to benefit from tourism and helping the money spent to stay inside the destination rather than leaking out to multi nationals.
4. Benefits Local Community through employment, use of local homestays & guest houses and leasing of community land.
5. Low Carbon Tourism Practices e.g. protecting natural resources like forests & other vegetation during tour helps to keep GHG emissions low. Forests & other vegetation are carbon sinks since they remove CO₂ from the atmosphere through photosynthesis.
6. Adopting Low Carbon Guidelines & Codes of Practice including:
 - NEC's: Environmental Code of Practice (ECOP) for Trekking
 - NEC's: ECOP for Bird watching
 - NEC's: ECOP for River Running
 - NEC's: ECOP for Campsites
 - GAB's Code of Conduct for Tour Guides
 - Waste Management Guidelines based around the 3Rs: Reduce, Re-use & Recycle
7. Low Carbon Transport. e.g. Tour Operators adopting Low Carbon Guidelines for Vehicle Fleet including 'Smarter Driving' techniques.
8. Carbon Footprint of the tour/holiday is measured.
9. Endorsed as Low Carbon by Bhutan Low Carbon Project implemented by ABTO.

Using the above criteria, ABTO formulated 20 Low Carbon Tours that included a range of durations. However, many tour operators chose to not adopt all tours as only a handful were considered highly attractive to high-yield source markets.

The 20 Low Carbon Tours developed by the Bhutan Low Carbon Tourism Project



Identified CO₂ Emissions KG CO₂/Tourist

Sl. No	Tour Package	Nights	Land Transport	5-Star Hotel	Total Per Tourist
1.	Canter and Gallop on Horses in the Blessed Valley, Bumthang	8	153	235	388
2.	Trek the Path of the Thunder Dragon	7	24	88 plus camping	112+
3.	West to East on Low Carbon Wheels: Mountain Biking Holiday	7	25	205	230
4.	Tour of a Lifetime - Tour of the Dragon	7	67	205	272
5.	A Green Getaway Alcove Wangdue Ecolodge	7	58	14	72
6.	Ecolodges in the Royal Manas National Park	15	184	166	350
7.	Ecoadventures in the Royal Botanical Park	6	25	176	201
8.	Natural Botanical Marvel Rhododendrons!	7	107	205	312
9.	Experience Bhutan on a Walking Excursion!	10	153	293	446
10.	Run in Bhutan for Low Carbon Tourism! (Bhutan International Marathon)	7	53	205	258
11.	Land Least Trekking - Zhemgang!	10	245	129	374
12.	Harmony in Conservation Phobjikha Valley	8	83	235	318
13.	GNH Travel - a Touch of Bhutan's Happiness Formula	15	226	439	665
14.	Weave Your Path in Bhutan - Textile Trip	15	255	439	694
15.	Year Long Tributes to Guru Padmasambhava - Tsechus!	10	153	293	446
16.	Trongsa Special - the Regal Heritage!	10	153	293	446
17.	Living Fortresses from the Ancient!	15	226	439	665
18.	Eastward to Drametse Source of the Dance of Drums!	10	406	293	699
19.	Culinary Adventure in Bhutan	15	227	439	666
20.	Wellness Treats to Spiritual Awakening!	15	226	439	665

Source: Low Carbon Tourism Project, Bhutan: '20' Low Carbon Tours, Recommendations & Carbon Footprint Calculation, Mega skills Research Limited UK, 2015



Bhutan has maintained an average trip duration of 7 days since tourism first began in the 1970s, along with higher volumes at festivals and in the west of the country, with eastern areas less visited. The new Low Carbon Tours attempted to redress this imbalance but it was clear that adoption of the Low Carbon Tours by both operators and tourists remained low.

The mixed success of the Low Carbon products revealed that commercial demands were playing a critical role in the promotion of products to key source markets. Many international operators had somewhat fixed ideas about what could be appealing to their clients, and Bhutan operators were not in strong bargaining positions to influence those opinions.

A Balanced Approach, 2019-24

By 2019, Inbound tourism had grown to 315,599 with significant increases in new hotels and vehicles investment, and accompanying negative impacts. Roadside rubbish was obvious, congestion commonplace and a cause of access-stress for locals. The sudden and devastating rise of Covid decimated the Bhutanese tourism industry but also provided an opportunity to rethink objectives and approach.

The Government of Bhutan did not want to diverge from the enduring goal of HIGH VALUE, LOW VOLUME tourism. Therefore, an increase in the Sustainable Development Fee was introduced in 2022, along with reduced regulation of visitor arrivals, who no longer required a tour operator to organise their trip. These changes had a profound effect on established entrepreneurs who now had to rethink their marketing and product offers as pricing and business relationships strained. To better understand the potential impact of these changes, ABTO undertook a market assessment of international and regional visitors – what was motivating them to come to Bhutan and were their expectations being met?

The tourism assessment concluded the following:

- • As a 'bucket list' destination Bhutan has to enhance experience curation through improved quality and sensitive narrative development.
- • Bhutan's source markets are largely price insensitive due to older demographics and specific interest groups, but quality must be delivered consistently.
- • To reduce negative impacts, enhance livelihoods and increase market appeal, a new model for designing sustainable experiences was recommended in conjunction with sustainability related standards and programs for tour operators, hotels and throughout the supply chain.



The majority (consistently over 80%) of international visitors remain in the Western Bhutan regions of Paro, Punkaha and Thimphu, so ABTO resolved to apply their new model to these areas first.

To begin, 16 Permanent Products were assessed using a specific location-based approach to identify strengths and weaknesses. Building on insights from previous projects, ABTO considered all aspects of tourism asset management from local authorities, communities, suppliers and businesses directly engaged with tourism, including airlines, accommodation, transportation, restaurants, waste management and human-powered activities.

ABTO 16 Permanent Products, 2024

Permanent Product	Impact Management Initiative
THIMPHU	
Thimphu Tshechu	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
Northern City Centre - Dzong / Textile Museum / Folk Heritage Museum / Zorig Chusum / Changangka Lhakhang	5 Km walking tour taking in major sights Waste collection & management system
Buddha Dordenma Statue & Kuensel Phodrang	12km walking tour taking in all sights Waste collection & management system
Druk Path Trek & Phajoding Monastery	EV transport to & from trail Waste collection system
Chari & Tango Monasteries	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
PARO	
Paro Tshechu	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
Paro Dzong / City Centre / Museum	5 Km walking tour from city to Dzong to Museum & back Waste collection & management system
Taksang Lhakang	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
Drugkyel Dzong	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
Chelela & Kila Goenpa	5km walk from Chele La to Kila Goenpa plus 5 Km downhill back to main road, total = 10 Km EV transport access & recharging Waste collection system
Paro Airport	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
Haa Homestays	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system



PUNAKHA

	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
Punakha Domchhen	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection & management system
Punakha Dzong	Half and Full-day walking trail Punakha-Semtokha via Dochu La EV transport access & recharging
Dochula Pass	Waste collection & management system 2km walking trail
Chhimi Lhakhang	EV transport access & recharging Waste collection and management system

Source: Bhutan: Tourism Market Assessment, ABTO, 2022.

These products were then matched to international source market preferences and impact hot spots identified with relevant reduction and mitigation actions. An ABTO Survey conducted in 2022 of domestic and international tur operators raised the question of how to improve alignment between operational priorities:

Which of the following elements do you consider relevant to improve Bhutan as sustainable destination?

	Bhutan Inbound Operators	International Outbound Operators
Sustainable Holiday Packages	1st	1st
Better trainings for guides on sustainability principles	2nd	Equal 4th
Electric vehicle transport	3rd	Not rated
Less plastic waste in destinations	4th	6th
Offer alternative non-mainstream destinations	Equal 5th	12th
More sustainable accommodations	Equal 5th	11th
Customer communication messages on relevant sustainability matters in the destination	Equal 5th	7th
Less plastic water bottles	8th	Equal 2nd
More waste recycling opportunities	12th	Equal 2nd
More responsible visits to local communities	9th	Equal 4th

Source: Bhutan: Tourism Market Assessment, ABTO, 2022.



The market assessment concluded that the importance of sustainability to the international and Bhutanese travel sector was 'foundational' and should be the basis for reaching towards a regenerative system. In particular, the following issues were identified:

- There is strong recognition of the importance of sustainability among international and domestic clients and operators.
- International operators are more inclined to believe that their local partners require support and assistance to more effectively engage with sustainability initiatives.
- There is a significant demand to develop sustainable tours for tour operators and to assist in their communication.
- Tour operators are not working closely enough together nor with stakeholders to improve sustainability in products and packages.
- The tourism industry in Bhutan needs to collaborate and cooperate to develop improve sustainability packages. This needs to be accompanied by trainings for guides, communities, waste management companies and localised supply chain stakeholders.

A Holistic Approach, 2025

By the end of 2024, it was the realisation that a systemic approach was required, and when combined with the rise of the regenerative tourism field, this blossomed into a renewed Holistic Approach. In the unique and highly regulated Bhutanese tourism marketplace, ABTO discovered that an operational foundation to tourism management should be the tri-partite of the Bhutan Green Hotel Standard, the Bhutan Tour Operator Standard and the Greenhouse Gas Emission Tool. These standards and tool form the 'hygiene level' or industry platform with which stakeholders can interact and have a clear understanding of common objectives. In the highly complex tourism value chain knowledge levels vary but a shared basis for interaction needs to be established and this inclusive approach develops a common narrative. However, there was also a recognition that these tools would represent a steep learning curve for many, so a phased approach was taken:

1. Hotels would focus first on daily operational imperatives through compliance with the Bhutan Green Hotel Standards (BGHS).
2. our operators would focus first on package design to ensure expectation fulfilment through the Bhutan Tour Operator Standards (BTOS).
3. Both to be followed by deeper understanding of greenhouse gas emission (GHGe) calculation methodology and simultaneously including the extended value chain, including drivers, guides and suppliers.



For early adopters, a GHGe tool has been developed that has higher accuracy and increased scope than the calculations used in earlier projects. International flights from from last port of call remain, and values for accommodation, land transport, activities, food and beverages, and waste management (not just creation) have all been improved. Based on earlier findings, handicrafts had a very low footprint with a strong positive social impact, so they are not included. Having said that, there is an issue with imported products that needs to be addressed through research and stakeholder consultation. Another area that was deemed overly complicated at first but is slated for roll out, are business operation emissions. As most companies are very small (less than 10 staff) and power use is 100% hydroelectricity, actual emissions from tour arrangements are a higher priority.

Considering hotels and operators engaged with sustainability assessment standards, ABTO then combined the permanent products into desirable tour packages that fit with key source markets and that offer opportunities for customisation (for example, better scoring BGHS locations), as well as more human-powered activities. The revised GHGe calculation tool is then applied by operators. So far ABTO has found that the tool helps to improve awareness and encourage behavioural change through making better, more sustainable choices. There have been many changes to calculating GHGs over the years, so a direct comparison to the 2015 base line is problematic, but we can certainly apply the tool to equivalent products and packages from 2019 when they were first researched.



To summarise, SUSTOUR and Government of Bhutan initiatives that have impacted GHGs associated with the tour packages:

- Transport Electrification: 300 EV taxis and many new SUV EVs used by tour operators. Introduction of EV buses for public transport. Rapid development of EV recharging locations – currently in all major tourist destinations and now expanding through hotel parking stations - 714 EVs are currently registered in the country, with plans to increase this to one station for every 15 EVs by 2030 (source: Bhutan Broadcasting Service quoting the Minister for Energy and Natural Resources, 29 May, 2025).

EV Charging Stations in Bhutan





- Training of Green Supply Networks – working through metropolitan and local administration systems, ABTO connects tourism entrepreneurs (mostly hotels) with local farmers to help them plan demand and supply for the year. Additional benefits include price stability, improving quality and variety, and building a story / narrative for promotions.
- Sustainable Driving Practices: By mandating a lower speed limit, Bhutan effectively reduces vehicular emissions, contributing to cleaner air and a reduction in noise pollution. This creates a more pleasant and healthy environment for both residents and visitors, preserving the tranquillity and purity that Bhutan is known for.
- Bhutan Green Hotel Standard (BGHS) – a range of 70 internationally aligned sustainability performance criteria that are designed to enhance positive behavioural changes and responsible choices across all hotel operations.
- Bhutan Tour Operator Standard (BTOS) – a range of 70 internationally aligned sustainability performance criteria that are designed to enhance positive behavioural changes and responsible choices across all tour operations.
- Eat Local Campaign – Linked to Green Supply Networks, this awareness program highlights local restaurants, which enriches the tourism experience by fostering authentic cultural exchanges and providing insights into Bhutanese lifestyle and cuisine. It supports local economies, sustains traditional crafts and culinary heritage, and promotes sustainable tourism practices by reducing the carbon footprint associated with international chains.
- Healthy Tourism - Human-powered activities during tours in Bhutan, such as hiking and biking, directly contribute to sustainable tourism by minimizing carbon emissions and environmental impact. These activities promote health and wellness, offer immersive cultural and natural experiences, and support local economies by engaging with community-based services, embodying Bhutan's principles of environmental conservation and Gross National Happiness.
- Integrated Waste Management Plan: system, especially in tourism hotspots (Punakha (Chimi Lhakhang), Thimphu (Phajoding) and Paro (Municipality)) that include comprehensive separation centre, CCTV. Extensive signage and administrative budget.
- An intuitive and easily accessible GHGe calculation tool for TOs and tourists to assess their footprint and see the impact of greener choices – the full methodology is available at [www. NEW TOOL WEBSITE .com](http://www.NEWTOOLWEBSITE.com)
- The Rise of Regenerative Tourism: Nascent, but rapidly growing use of Farm Resorts and localised supply chains by accommodation and restaurants.

Recommendations & Thoughts for the Future



1. Develop social impact assessment system that includes entire value chain – this will require extensive collaborative planning and would complete the foundation to building a regenerative tourism industry.
2. Enhance positive social impacts because the more people benefit the greater the force for change can be. For example, a regulated and certified 'Made in Bhutan' mark with shops dedicated to made in Bhutan products, this should also include service and business matching-making forums across the country.
3. Improve GHGe datasets through local research institutes, this will improve emission calculation accuracy. Industry bodies, like ABTO, should identify, monitor and manage hotspots. Additionally, the calculation tool needs to include business operations for hotels and tour operators so that the Department of Tourism can control total industry emissions.
4. Increase green investment incentives for electrification (especially solar) and water purification systems for hotels, EV Carts for popular festivals when there is transport stress and how to manage embedded emissions associated with new builds, which may also include establishing a carbon price.
5. Create a green transition fund for the tourism sector, possibly financed through voluntary offsetting and micro-offsetting schemes. This could also be linked to investment incentives.
6. Be a source of inspiration for regional change by working with national and international bodies like ICIMOD and industry associations Bhutan can drive the alignment of standards, highlight common issues, work together to find solutions and share the vision of regenerative tourism.
7. Regular interaction with regional tourism associations who would have signed MoU with ABTO during the August 2025 "Regenerative Bhutan Forum – the pathway to Regenerative Tourism".
8. Department of Tourism's commitment to hold Regenerative Bhutan Forum on an annual basis and also to have repository of reports and data through BGHS, BTOS and GHGe reporting mechanism.

SESSION BRIEFS



Bhutan's Carbon Journey in Tourism

Day 2: Session 1 Workshop

Day 3: Field trip 1

Mr Robin Boustead

Bhutan first publicly announced its plan to become carbon neutral at COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009. This commitment was reaffirmed in its second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), where Bhutan adopted a net-zero emissions target by 2050. Bhutan was and is carbon neutral in practice, absorbing more carbon dioxide than it emits through its extensive forests. But anthropomorphic emissions continue to rise and could threaten the country's carbon neutral status.

Minimising emissions associated with the tourism sector is therefore a key step towards long-term carbon neutrality, and this was recognised by ABTO as far back as 2011.

ABTO Carbon Footprint Project 2012-14

In 2012, with a little over 100,000 tourists ABTO calculated the CO2 footprint of 20 tourism products. The approach was ambitious for the time as it included international flights (only from last port of call), accommodation, restaurants, tour operators, handicrafts and associated retail shops. Hard data was difficult to come by and research into emission factors was emergent. Values for energy use, water use and solid waste generation often had to be estimated, so the results contained inaccuracies, but it was a great baseline for sector performance and identifying potential opportunities for improvement.

TICKETS



Date: 18th August - 20th August Time: 9 am - 5 pm Location: Dungkar Dzong

USD \$250 / per person

- ✓ SDF waivers for 5 Nights (worth USD 500)
- ✓ Entry fee for the 3 day conference (meals/tea/coffee included)
- ✓ Session with keynote speakers/renowned speakers
- ✓ Field visit on the 3rd day (transport/accomodation/meals included)
- ✓ Transportation to the venue
- ✗ Flight Tickets
- ✗ Hotel bookings

Get tickets now!

FLIGHT TICKETS



☎ +975 2 322868

✉ info@regenerativebhutanforum.com

🌐 www.regenerativebhutanforum.com

Note: Upto 15% discount

PARTNER HOTEL



Le Meridien Paro

+975 08 270 301

reservation.paro@lemeridien.com

www.lemeridien.com

Book Now

Zhewaling Paro

+975 08 271 277

info@zhiwaling.com

www.zhiwalingheritage.com

Book Now



Dema Resort

+975 08 274 222

demaresort25@gmail.com

www.demaresort.com

Book Now



Rema Resort

☎ +975 08 271 082

✉ remaresort1@gmail.com

🌐 www.remaresort.com

Book Now

Gawaling Hotel

+975 08 276 588 ☎

gawalinghotel1@gmail.com ✉

www.gawalinghotel.com 🌐

Book Now



Seva Hotel

☎ (+975) 17175050 / 17176060

✉ info@thesevahotelbhutan.com

🌐 www.thesevahotelbhutan.com

Book Now

Organised by

 **DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM**



switchasia




BHUTAN
Believe



REGENERATIVE BHUTAN FORUM

BHUTAN | AUGUST 18-20, 2025

 +975 2 322868

 info@regenerativebhutanforum.com

 www.regenerativebhutanforum.com

