



## Textiles of Bhutan

Bhutan is a small Himalayan Kingdom with a history of rich cultural Heritage. One of its unique features is hand woven textile. It is also one of the glories of Bhutanese popular art. Central and Eastern Bhutan are the primary centers of textile production, which is primarily a home handicraft done by women. While Thimphu itself has all the varieties of local textiles, it wouldn't compensate for a trip to the interior where some of Bhutan's most famous textiles have originated. We can watch live demonstrations by rural Bhutanese women of weaving traditions, preparation of dyes and other colors. Different regions have typical designs and fabrics, and even looms of special design. This tour travels across Bhutan to visit folk textile centers, learn about the techniques of weaving, the significance of Bhutanese designs and colors, and to meet the weavers themselves



1. Bumthang in central Bhutan is acclaimed for weaving with sheep wool. The weavers here produce heavy twill fabrics made into blankets, rain cloaks, shawls and winter garments. All weaving is done on horizontal frame looms. Plaid woolen fabrics whose predominant colour is red (mathra) are trademark of Bumthang. Bumthang is also the home of yathra –a woolen cloth patterned with traditional designs. The group will visit the Chumey and the Ura villages where traditional weaving is still strong.

2. Kurtoe/Lhuntse in North Central Bhutan is famous for cloth decorated with Kushu, a regional style of continuous supplementary-weft patterning on a wide field. The area is also known for mathra (plaid cloth, predominantly red pattern). The most celebrated of Kurto's supplementary-weft pattern weaving is the woman's dress called Kushuthara (brocaded dress), decorated in the Kushu technique also seen on bags and other textiles. In Khoma village, a three-hour walk from road head where, again, live demonstrations will be held. In Khoma the group can also get acquainted with the Bhutanese tradition of receiving and sending off guests, an elaborate but fully satisfying experience which has disappeared in other parts of Bhutan.



3. Eastern Bhutan is renowned for plain weave fabrics, supplementary-weft-patterned fabrics, and supplementary warp patterned fabrics. This region produces an enviable range of textiles, of which the most coveted is Aikapur, characterized by alternating bands of plain weave (pang) and supplementary warp patterning (hor) done in five combinations. The group will visit Radhi, a village famous for producing this cloth.

5. It would be a must to visit Khaling in Trashigang where the government has established the country's

only handloom center. The center is known for its innovative designs, incorporating both traditional and modern designs and colorings.

## **TEXTILES**

### ***Weaving a Spell Over You.***

Few people know of the isolated Himalayan country of Bhutan. Still fewer know that among its many hidden treasures is a magical mosaic of rich vibrant hues and patterns, in myriad weaves. Weaves that have today become vivid symbols of the Dragon Kingdom.

Discover this timeless tradition on the Weaver's Trail, a 13-day trip through the weaves of Bhutan, with Silver Dragon Tours & Treks, Thimphu. (A world Away Travels). Your host to a wondrous country.

### ***Weaving- More than a tradition, a Passion!***

The art of weaving is held in high esteem in Bhutan and it is surprisingly prevalent. Many women, especially in central and eastern Bhutan, weave at home. They do not belong to any particular social group or corporation, but are simple village women who use their spare time to weave clothes for their family, and sell what is left over.

The economic benefits of weaving, however, cannot fully indicate its social significance. The recognition and prestige that goes with being acknowledged as a good weaver is immense. In Bhutan, there are many women who have earned the honour! so intrinsic is weaving to the culture and tradition of Bhutan, that it is a favourite topic of discussion. People constantly compare notes and judge the quality of weaving. The tightness of the ground weave, the delicacy of the supplementary weft or warp patterns, the ingenuity of motifs, colours and combinations. Each of these is discussed and commented upon at length.



### ***Weaves that capture the imagination:***

Bhutanese weavers use cotton, silk or wool to create intricate patterns. But the fabrics they are best known for are Brocade Patterning and the Floating Warp technique. In the former, designs are woven in the ground with either the supplementary weft or the supplementary warp technique. The floating warp technique creates beautiful patterns on the front of the fabric. But such is the skill involved that the reverse bears no evidence of this.

### ***Weaving in Bhutan- Unique dimensions.***

Weaving has special social significance in Bhutan. Apart from weaving for home consumption and supplementing income, fabrics are also woven to be given as gifts. On occasions like promotions and marriages, they are presented in a set of prescribed odd numbers. These may be 3,5,7 or 9, according to the rank of the recipient. What's more, reselling a dress (Kira) is fairly common. Whenever a person does not like her Kira any more or needs to raise money, a sale may take place. Fabrics are considered assets, which can be traded in the same way as gold, land, or stocks and bonds. Once an economic force, the gift of woven fabrics has today become an important custom. A proud tradition that is prevalent even in the urban parts of Bhutan.



### ***Looms that create magic.***

The tools of the weaver's trade are themselves objects of great fascination. Traditionally, fabrics were woven on a back strap vertical loom. Today, this loom is used mainly for cotton and silk fabrics, while wool is woven on a pedal loom. The four types of looms in use nowadays are:-

The fixed horizontal frame loom- Originally from Tibet, this type of loom is used by the people of Central and Western Bhutan to produce 'Setha'. Interestingly, the actual operation of the loom-also the most

strenuous part-is done by foot.

The fixed horizontal frame looms with a back strap. The women of Laya (N.Bhutan) use this to weave yak hair and nettle fibre into elegant, stylish designs.

The fixed vertical frame loom. A traditional loom, which is used to weave cotton and silk.

The card loom. A uniquely shaped loom that is used to weave kera-the long thin waistbands with which both men and women secure their traditional robes.

### ***The fine art of Dyeing.***

In Bhutan dyeing is done throughout the year. The dyes used are the red lac dye and Assam indigo.

However, red lac dyeing of silk, wool and cotton is generally preceded by a dyeing process using leaves of the Zhim tree. To impart a rich yellow colour to the fabric.

### ***The Weavers Trail.***

Revel in the magic of Bhutanese fabrics as you follow The Weavers Trail. An itinerary that specially captures the enchantment of Bhutan's matchless fabrics and takes you through every step of their creation.

The Weavers Trail helps you unravel the secrets behind.

- \* Materials that make the dye.
- \* Dyeing and spinning of yarn.
- \* The loom and weaving kit.
- \* Actual weaving methodology.
- \* Finished products.

To see how the Bhutanese weaves come alive, The Weavers Trail takes you through:

**Bumthang** - where you see the sheep development farm managed by the Animal Husbandry Department. This abundant supply of wool is then woven into the country's famous fabrics - Matha and Seta.

**Pema Gatsel** - an area that holds out several insights into traditional weaving at its very best.

**Radi** - a place where you'll see households with expert weavers producing the finest fabrics. The same fabrics that are in such great demand in the markets of Thimphu.

**Khaling** - this centre, not very far from Trashigang, produces fabrics which you will see again at the Handicrafts Emporium in Thimphu.

