

Tourism Law and Legislation

Assignment 3

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How Bhutan Can Benefit from Applying the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

The *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* (GCET) adopted by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) provides a framework of ethical principles aimed at guiding tourism development toward sustainability, cultural respect, and equitable economic benefit. It seeks to maximize tourism's positive impacts while minimizing negative effects on environments, societies, and cultural heritage. The Code stresses respect for local cultures, protection of natural and cultural resources, and equitable sharing of benefits with host communities (UNWTO, 1999).

1. Strengthening Cultural and Environmental Protection

GCET emphasizes that tourism activities “*should be conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of the host regions and countries*” and that cultural heritage and natural environments must be protected and passed on intact to future generations (UNWTO, Articles 1 and 4). Bhutan already follows a *high-value, low-impact* tourism policy that limits visitor numbers and charges a Sustainable Development Fee (SDF), primarily to protect its fragile mountain ecosystems and cultural sites (Bhutan tourism policy). By formally aligning with GCET principles, Bhutan could more clearly justify and expand these conservation practices within an internationally recognized ethical framework. This could reinforce Bhutan's constitutional mandate for environmental protection and its commitment to maintain forest cover above the legally required 60 % threshold, preserving biodiversity and the landscape that underpins both ecological and cultural values.

Embedding GCET goals into national tourism planning would help ensure that tourism development never undermines cultural integrity or environmental sustainability. It would also

strengthen policy coherence between tourism and Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy, which values balanced socio-economic development and cultural preservation.

2. Promoting Inclusive Socio-Economic Benefits for Local Communities

One of GCET's core tenets is that "*local populations should be associated with tourism activities and share equitably in the economic, social and cultural benefits*" of tourism (UNWTO, Article 5). Bhutan's tourism strategy already channels revenue from the SDF into education, healthcare, and rural development, ensuring funds circulate back into society rather than leak out of the country. This model has supported socio-economic development in remote areas while safeguarding community well-being (Bhutan sustainable tourism research).

Applying GCET principles would encourage more systematic inclusion of local people in decision-making processes, training, and employment within the tourism sector, ensuring that benefits are widely distributed and local knowledge is respected. It also aligns with the ethical call for stakeholder participation and transparency in tourism planning. Such inclusive practice would enhance social equity, foster community empowerment, and strengthen the cultural authenticity surrounding Bhutan's tourism offerings.

Conclusion

By applying the GCET framework, Bhutan can deepen its already progressive tourism policy in ways that protect cultural and natural heritage and ensure that tourism contributes meaningfully to local well-being and sustainable development. GCET gives Bhutan an ethical blueprint that complements its *high-value, low-impact* model and reinforces its broader goals under GNH.

References

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