

Bhutan opens itself to the world - and tourists

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Travelers to the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan have long likened it to a real-life Shangri-La – a mystical, happy place, accessible to few outsiders.

It's a country that measures growth by measuring Gross National Happiness, and that guards its forest cover so fiercely that it is the only country in the world that absorbs more carbon dioxide than it produces.

From April 2022, international tourists will be able to walk the trail for the first time. The move will provide much needed economic benefits to rural communities along the way.

Community tourism pioneer, G Adventures, has been selected by the Bhutan Canada Foundation, the non-profit that led the restoration of the trail, as the first group adventure operator when the trail launches to the public. Two new Active trekking itineraries are now available to book with G Adventures, an 11-day Camp the Trans Bhutan Trail trip, which features camping and homestays, and a 12-day Highlights of the Trans Bhutan Trail itinerary with accommodation in homestays, locally-

owned guest houses and hotels.

Yves Marceau, Vice President- product, G Adventures, said the operator's two tours focus on trekking specially selected parts of the 403-km (250-mile) trail and connecting with local people to learn about Bhutanese life and culture, thus combining active travel and cultural immersion with the benefits of community tourism.

"We're honoured to be working with the Bhutan Canada Foundation and the Trans Bhutan Trail to launch this newly restored route in magical Bhutan. It's a country we've run tours in for more than a decade and have long admired for its commitment to the happiness of its people and sustainable way of life, which are both philosophies that align with our values as an organization," said Marceau.

Sam Blyth, chair of the Bhutan Canada Foundation and lead donor for the Trans Bhutan Trail, says G Adventures was an obvious partner to help relaunch the trail given the company's long history and success running small group tours and giving back to destinations through its commitment to community tourism.

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